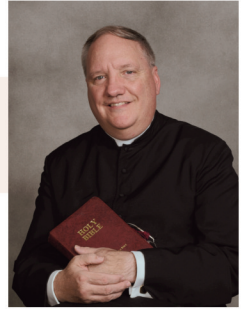




From the Pastor



October 11, 2026

Dearest Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

This weekend we welcome Fr. Steven Weller to Newman. Fr. Weller is the director of vocations for the Diocese of La Crosse and is coming specifically to speak on that topic.

This is also our weekend for celebrating our patron saint – St. John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-1890). As some of you will know, St. John Henry Newman was one of the great figures of the “Oxford Movement” in the late 19th century. This was a movement in England which sought to preserve in Anglicanism (Episcopal Church in the United States) the “middle way” between the *Papists* (Catholics) and Protestantism. At a certain point he came to the conclusion that it didn’t work and so he gave up his position as rector of St. Mary’s (Oxford) and his other roles at Oxford in order to become Catholic.

Becoming Catholic, St. John Henry Newman continued to be a man of academic renown as well as a priest concerned for the Church and for the people. He was the first rector of the Catholic University of Dublin for which he wrote a series of lectures which became his book “The Idea of a University”. He also wrote on the “Development of Doctrine” and “An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent” – both books which continue to be important today. He was also a poet and wrote “The Dream of Gerontius” which was put to music by Sir Edward Elgar in the form of an oratorio as well as the “Lead, Kindly Light” which was put to a hymn tune and is still highly regarded today. Finally, there are many other books including collections of his sermons and tracts.

St. John Henry Newman was a founder of the Birmingham Oratory where he lived and ministered to the people of Birmingham. He was created a Cardinal by Pope Leo XIII in 1879. He is often called the “unseen father of Vatican II”.

St. John Henry Newman was an important figure in my own intellectual and pastoral formation. I took a number of electives on his thought during my seminary years and continue to benefit from both his writings and his example of pastoral accompaniment today. He is one of my seven favorite saints. So, let us celebrate our patron and seek to know him better, that we may all be informed and inspired by his example.

“May Christ our Lord help us all with His bountiful grace, so that we may know His holy will and perfectly fulfill it.” (*St. Ignatius of Loyola*)

Fr. Michael

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On Living the Vocation to the Holiness

Last week I talked some about what the bells at Mass and Adoration are for. This week I'd like to talk a little bit about incense. I know this is a topic of difficulty for some. We have people, seemingly more than in the past, who react quite badly to smoke; and I will address that. Others just wonder why we do it.

Incense is an age-old part of worship, both in Judaism & Christianity, as well as most other cultures around the world. Not all used the gum from trees in Africa, but almost all cultures had some plant-based material they burned as a part of their prayer rituals. The point of the burning of these materials was to show honor to the gods.

In the Book of Psalms we read: "Let my prayer be incense before you; my uplifted hands an evening offering." (Psalm 141:2) In the Gospel According to St. Luke (1:8-9) we read about Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, entering the Temple in order to offer the incense at the "hour of incense" during which Gabriel appeared to him to announce the birth of John. We also read of incense in the book of Revelations in two separate place (chapters 8 and 14). In fact, there are dozens of references to incense throughout the Old Testament and five distinct references in the New Testament.

So, in Christian worship, incense is a sweet smelling smoke which rises to heaven, signifying our "sweet smelling" prayers rising to the Father and showing honor to the Father. Indeed, the word *frankincense* comes from old French *franc encens* meaning "high quality incense".

The big issue we face in contemporary times is twofold. First, it takes time to use incense. In the minds of some, such an action, which seems an anachronism, is neither meaningful nor worth the time it takes. For others it is an issue of physical, allergic reactions to smoke. While we use only the best incense (literally: *frankincense*), that is still a problem for some. That is why I have always made clear when incense will and will not be used. At Sacred Heart – St. Patrick's, incense is only used at the 10:30am Mass on Sunday and its equivalent for Holy Days of Obligation, and at Adoration. At Newman, after some very fruitful discussion with members of the parish, incense is used at the 7:30pm Mass on Sundays and its equivalent on Holy Days of Obligation. The only exceptions to this general rule will be the Mass in the middle of the night at Christmas, and Holy Thursday / Holy Saturday Masses during the Triduum (Easter time).

If you have anything to add to this discussion, Fr. Kyle and I are always happy to engage.

