October 9th: Memorial of Saint John Henry Newman, priest and cardinal

Gospel text (*Mt* 13:47-52): Jesus said to the disciples: “The Kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.”“Do you understand all these things?” They answered, “Yes.” And he replied, “Then every scribe who has been instructed in the Kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.”

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Fr. Gavan JENNINGS
(Dublín, Ireland)

Today, is the feast of St John Henry Newman, celebrated particularly in England and Wales. St John Henry was the most renowned English convert of the nineteenth century. His conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism in 1845 shocked his academic colleagues in Oxford, and yet led to a steady stream of other conversions.

Today’s Gospel passage seems to be chosen for its last line: «Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old» (Mt 13:52). Newman was a great “scribe” —a writer of wonderful sermons, essays, books and even poems. He drew from the “storeroom” of his powerful mind great reflections which have greatly enriched the Church. As Pope Benedict XVI said in Newman’s beatification ceremony in 2010: «The definite service to which Blessed John Henry was called involved applying his keen intellect and his prolific pen to many of the most pressing ‘subjects of the day’. His insights into the relationship between faith and reason, into the vital place of revealed religion in civilized society, and into the need for a broadly-based and wide-ranging approach to education were not only of profound importance for Victorian England, but continue today to inspire and enlighten many all over the world».

Newman’s feastday is a good day to commit ourselves to the hallowed practice of spiritual reading: dedicating a few minutes each day to the reading of a book which will help us deepen in our understanding of, and love for, our faith. It was reading the works of the Fathers of the Church in particular that drew St John Henry to the fullness of the Faith. In a letter to an old colleague written

several years after his conversion, Newman wrote: «The Fathers made me a Catholic, and I'm not going to kick down the ladder by which I ascended into the Church». Let us too use the great spiritual works written by men and women such as St John Henry Newman as a ladder to lead us closer and closer to God.