

22 September 2010

My dear Friends

I write to you full of gratitude for the most wonderful four days of the Holy Father's visit to the UK and in particular for the unforgettable and grace-filled experience of his presence in our own diocese and in the city of Birmingham. I felt immensely honoured to welcome the Holy Father to Cofton Park on your behalf, and the priests and deacons, the religious men and women and all the lay faithful of our diocese were very much in my heart at that moment on Sunday morning as the sun began to shine.

I also feel an immense sense of pride in the wonderful example of faithfulness to Christ which you have all shown in welcoming the Holy Father with affection and enthusiasm – it has had a powerful impact not only within our Catholic communities but much more widely.

Many people have said that the Holy Father's visit has given our country an opportunity to see the real Pope Benedict XVI, and I think that is true, judging from the wide appreciation for the gentle and considerate manner he showed with everybody he met. I also think that the Papal Visit enabled the Holy Father to have a valuable insight into the life and witness of our own diocese, seeing the prayerfulness of our people, young and old, and witnessing our loyalty to the Successor of Peter.

Alongside my gratitude to the Holy Father for coming to beatify Blessed John Henry Newman in person, I also wish to thank the many people who worked together so hard and effectively not only to make the Holy Father's visit to our diocese possible but to make it the great success that it has proved to be. For all of this we can now thank Blessed John Henry Newman for his intercession.

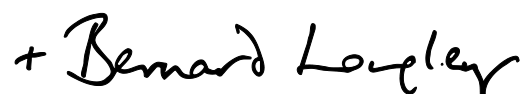
For all that they have done I wish to make special mention of my gratitude to the pilgrim leaders, the parish co-ordinators and the many volunteers who generously gave their time as stewards and marshals, in the choir and as medical volunteers. Your dedicated service helped all the pilgrims have a deeply spiritual experience on Sunday. Among those to whom I have a particular debt of gratitude I must mention Canon Pat Browne, the Diocesan Coordinator for the Papal Visit, Frs Timothy Menezes and Jan Nowotnik for their liturgical expertise, Fr Peter Jones for leading all the singers and musicians, Mgr Mark Crisp the Rector of St Mary's College, Oscott and Fr Richard Duffield the Provost of the Birmingham Oratory – and I thank all those with whom they worked most closely across the diocese.

On Sunday 26 September I will be celebrating a special Diocesan Mass of Thanksgiving for the Papal Visit and Beatification at 4pm in Holy Family Church, Coventry, to which you are all warmly invited.

The throne used by the Holy Father at Cofton Park is now at Holy Family Church and I shall use the chalice, which is Pope Benedict's gift to our diocese, for the first time during this Mass. This will give us an opportunity to come together and thank our Lord for all that we have received, and to ask for his guidance on how we may make this experience bear "fruit that will last".

Let us continue to pray for and encourage one another in these remarkable days for the Catholic Church in England & Wales, for the whole country, and, of course, for our own diocese.

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Bernard Longley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

✠Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham