In September of 2010, Pope Benedict XVI traveled to England for the beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman, a man who died 120 years ago and spent much of his life behind the walls of Oxford colleges and giving lectures. But when one looks at his life, one sees that this is no ordinary academic; but rather a man who was passionate about his faith which filled his soul, and a man who was clearly focused on deepening it and helping others to learn the truth about it, no matter what the cost.

Newman was born into a well-off family in London, the son of a banker. As a teenager, he fell in love with academics, studying the great writers and philosophers.

It was when he was 15 that he converted to Christianity, becoming an evangelical Calvinist. While he subscribed to this for a time, as he studied it more deeply he came to believe that this particular form of Christianity put too little emphasis on the Church and too much emphasis on faith alone and the individual. And so he embraced Anglicanism.

In June of 1824, he was ordained a deacon in Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford, and the following spring was ordained a priest, where for 2 years

he would be active in church work and writing. But already noted for his brilliant mind, Newman continued to embrace academics.

His first real exposure to the Catholic Church came when he visited Rome, which, upon a visit in 1832, he called “the most wonderful place on earth,” but referred to the Roman Catholic Church as “polytheistic, degrading and idolatrous.” Not too long after this he visited Sicily, where he fell seriously ill and attributed his cure to the belief that God had more work for him to do.

Back at Oxford, Newman became active in what was known as the “Oxford Movement,” which argued for the reinstatement of lost Christian Traditions into Anglicanism; seeing it as one of 3 branches Christianity. During this time in the early 1830s, he would do writing and speaking, which essentially was to argue for the position of a “middle road” of sorts between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. However in the years that followed, he came to realize that Catholicism was the road to travel.

His writings during this times, arguing for less Protesetantization of the Anglican Church, became widely popular, called the “Tracts for the Times.” They argued for the Real Presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament,

and there was also a lot of Catholic teaching in them that Newman argued were part of the authentic Christian faith. Gradually many Anglican authorities, seeing these, reacted with fear and anger.

Newman though was undeterred, despite the fact that some were saying his writings were too reflective of Catholic belief. But also as he wrote more and studied more, he was convinced that the Roman Catholic Church had held onto much of the original Christian doctrine that Protestant had abandoned; though he still felt Rome had added doctrines and practices that one could not reconcile with the Gospel, such as the saints and the primacy of the pope.

As he continued to write these tracts into the 1840s, he was spending a lot of time trying to keep Anglicans from becoming Catholics; but it was his own teaching bringing them that way, and his heart was going that way too. He was convinced that this middle way was the best way. But then in 1841, he talked about how the 39 Articles, which are a document of Anglican theology, should be interpreted in a Catholic sense. This outraged many and was condemned by many Anglican bishops. And at this point, Newman

realized that if the Anglican Church he belonged to was not, in fact, a branch of the Catholic Church, that he could not remain in it.

He soon retired from an active role in ministry, and took up a residence with a few like-minded people in a village near Oxford. He took to studying Catholicism more, setting about to demonstrate how the doctrines of the Catholic Church were the inevitable result of development over time, not knowing though if he would convince himself. He studied Catholic teaching and found how the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church were the growth and flower of the ancient teachings of the Apostles and Church Fathers. He completed the book-length “Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine,” which is an exhaustive tour of history and theology. He praised himself that if he reached a point where he convinced himself of the truth of the Catholic Church, he would then cease writing the book and become a Catholic. And so after months of long hours of study and work - often 14-plus days working into the night - he knew he had to cross the threshold into the Catholic Church.

In October of 1845 he resigned his position at Oriel College where he was a teacher, as he could not hold it as a Catholic. He told people who were

close to him that he would be becoming Catholic. A priest, Fr. Dominic Barberi, had received into the Church some of Newman's colleagues, and the day he arrived he found Newman before him, on his knees, asking to be received into the Church. Newman, on the day he became Catholic, wrote 30-plus letters to relatives, friends and colleagues to announce his decision. And on October 9, 1845, after a journey of a dozen-plus years, he became a Catholic, being confirmed on All Saints Day. Present were 10 or so former Anglican ministers who had also converted. Many more Anglicans would follow. He would spend a few years in Rome to study for ordination to the Catholic priesthood, being ordained in May of 1847. Here he became fascinated with Saint Philip Neri, the Italian Catholic priest who founded the society of Oratorians. Philip made personal ministry and working with youth ad young adults and the family a big part of his ministry, giving both academic and spiritual counseling to those in his care. After his ordination, the Pope, Piux IX, charged Newman with heading the Oratory in England; he established a house in Birmingham, an industrial city, where Newman would spend the rest of his life. The rest of his years were spent preaching and writing, and he was said to have had many converts.

While he had found where he needed to go in life, the road there and ahead would not be easy. Family turned on him; Anglican leaders condemned him, including one who argued that Newman was a proponent of dishonesty among the clergy. But Newman remained undeterred in his mission of being a Catholic apologist.

At the age of 79 in 1879, the pope made him a cardinal. It was seen as a turning point for English Catholics, as no more would they be called intellectually inferior or morally depraved just because they were Catholics. Attitudes were changing a bit by that point, and it was widely viewed as an honor.

Recently, he has been in the news again, along with another English Catholic, Fr. Ignatius Spencer, the great-great-great uncle of Princess Diana, himself a convert from a wealth noble English family and one-time Anglican priest. Fr. Spencer is on the way to canonization (he helped bring many Anglicans back to Catholicism as an apologist, walking away from his millions and comfortable life) and Pope Leo is honoring Saint John Henry Newman with the title “Doctor of the Church,” because his life and work are a testament to how we “seek what is above” as Saint Paul exhorts us to do.

So how about us? In our reading this week, we hear of Qoheleth, who is often identified as King Solomon in old age looking back; others think of him as a member of Solomon's court, or perhaps a church person. And he laments; the first reading comes across almost as if he is saying "what was the point of it all?" Solomon had power and wealth; but still he was mortal. The point is not that in and of themselves wealth or power or honor are bad, but when one puts all their energy into them, it begs the question, why? And in the Gospel, when we hear of the man who has so much he needs to build a bigger barn, and then presumably will need to build yet another barn down the road, he too will be mortal and die, but the deeper question Jesus asks is what will his life have been about?

Well to borrow from George Harrison, all things must pass; or, if you prefer, Kansas, all we are is dust in the wind.

There is much to enjoy in this world; Newman certainly had honor and prestige as a professor; Fr. Ignatius (formerly George Spencer) had both that an incredible wealth. But all of the things of this world do indeed fade away; our money we can't take with us and is dispersed to others; people

forget about the titles or positions we have; and the things we enjoy are fleeting. It's not to say we shouldn't enjoy things and savor them; I certainly do. And it's not to say that we also can't have money or wealth; I know many generous people who are wealthy, and were I to win the lottery I would not feel guilty about building a nice cabin up north and a winter retreat along the Gulf coast of Texas for bird photography getaways and to remind myself of what it feels like to experience temperatures above freezing. But the point is if all things will pass, do we put too much energy into these things. re we obsessed with money and possessions? Do we manipulate others so as to get our way? Do we put so much energy into recognition that we don't do things for the right reason? If we are fixed on Christ as Paul tells us, we'll know how to handle things. Most importantly, we'll find true happiness, which is in having a relationship with God, and our human relationships.

Second, once we realize where things fall into place, how do we seek the things above by staying on the right track. John Henry Newman wrote a prayer when he was 32, and still seeking. It was from his return trip to England after going through Italy. He wrote it when still an Anglican priest. It goes:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on.
The night is dark, and I am far from home—
Lead Thou me on…
So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile."

The 1832 trip to Italy deepened his inner search. Newman carried within him a thirst to know the depths of God, His "kindly Light," which for him was also the light of Truth—truth about Christ, the true nature of the Church, and the tradition of the early centuries, when the Church Fathers spoke to a still undivided Church. Oxford—epicenter of his faith and the place where the future saint lived and worked—became the road along which his convictions gradually shifted toward Catholicism. It would be 1846 when he entered the seminary despite being known all over the academic world, and a year later he was ordained a Catholic priest. I think for us, we "seek what is above" by doing things like listening to our conscience; through praying every day; through seeking people out who will tell us not what we want to hear but rather what we need to hear. When we do these things, it helps keep us humble, and reminds us we are always works in progress, and seekers. And of course with that, we also look for ways as did Saint John

Henry Newman to learn about not just our relationship with God, but what our faith teaches so we can articulate it.

Lastly, we help others to seek what is above. This isn't easy. As I've said a million times, and as we hear in the Gospel, we can expect to face hostility for what we believe. Just last week for instance, some members of our parish who are a part of Catholic Watchmen, a Catholic fraternal group, had a booth at Leprechaun Days to let people know about them and with some information on our faith, including our stance in defending life, which included an exhibit showing the development of life in the womb. They also had images of the face of Jesus, and different Catholic materials. I was told some of the visitors were high schoolers, who were fascinated about the development of life, but none had heard of this before or knew about this from health class or other life experiences. Apparently one teen was upset saying it was up to a woman to choose; and then the parish was contacted by a parent who was not there of course saying this shouldn't be in public. Thankfully we have a Constitution that says otherwise. As we read in 1 Peter 3:15, "always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope." This was Newman all those years ago, and this is us today when we do this very thing in our families, in our

workplaces, in conversations we have with others. It's not forcing the faith on people, it's reaching out to them and meeting them where they are at and challenging them. Because the message of the world is seek what you can see. Seek the sports trophy. Seek the perfect college. Seek the perfect job. Seek money in the bank. Seek the esteem of others. Seek praise. To get these things say the right things, avoid conflict, and focus on yourself. But all these things will pass. And at the end, what do we want to say before God when we speak of our lives? Hopefully it is how we made a difference in testifying to the faith, both through our words and through our actions of love. For, as Cardinal Francis George of Chicago once said, the only thing you take with you into the life to come is what you've given away on earth.

Maybe you've had to build a bigger barn or garage for your stuff, and that's not a bad thing. But hopefully it isn't the main thing in your life. Rather than building a bigger barn or earthly prestige, may we build up our treasure in heaven by going into this world and living and proclaiming the truth, remembering that so much of what we think matters so much is the stuff we can't take with us, but what we can do is grow in a love for God and change

the world for the better through seeking what is above and helping one another to do the same.