

Class Handout

Newman on Lent: Conversion, Conscience, and the Cross

Sunday 1: Lent as a Call from God

“Now Is the Acceptable Time”

Primary Text: *Newman on Lent: Meditations and Sermons*

By St. John Henry Cardinal Newman

1. Core Theme of the Lesson

Lent, according to St. John Henry Newman, is not merely a season of external practices. It is a direct call from God to conversion.

The Church interrupts ordinary life during Lent to remind us of eternal realities:

- Time is passing
- Judgment is real
- Grace is being offered now

Lent is meant to awaken the soul, not simply decorate the calendar.

Key Scripture:

“Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2)

2. Lent as a Divine Interruption

Newman teaches that the human soul naturally drifts into spiritual complacency. This drift is rarely dramatic; it is usually quiet and gradual.

A person may:

- Attend Mass
- Pray occasionally
- Observe religious customs

Yet never seriously examine their soul.

Lent exists to interrupt this spiritual routine.

God uses:

- Sacred seasons
- Preaching

- Conscience
- Suffering
- Reflection

to awaken the soul to its true condition.

Lent is therefore not meant to be comfortable.
It is meant to be spiritually awakening.

3. The Danger of Delayed Repentance

One of Newman's central warnings is the illusion of "later."

Most people do not reject conversion outright.
Instead, they postpone it.

Common attitudes:

- "I will change later."
- "I will be more serious about God when life is calmer."
- "I will deal with my sins when I am ready."

Newman teaches that every delay weakens the soul's response to grace.
Habits deepen, attachments grow stronger, and conversion becomes more difficult over time.

Important Truth:

The longer repentance is delayed, the harder it becomes.

Lent calls us to act now, not later.

4. Conscience: The Voice of God Within

Newman describes conscience as the interior witness to God's law in the soul.

It is not:

- A personal opinion
- A feeling
- A subjective preference

It is the echo of God's voice calling the soul to truth and repentance.

During Lent, conscience becomes clearer because distractions are reduced:

- More prayer

- More silence
- More reflection
- Less indulgence

Conscience often reveals:

- Hidden pride
- Lukewarm prayer
- Spiritual indifference
- Attachment to comfort
- Avoidance of sacrifice

Ignoring conscience repeatedly can lead to spiritual dullness.

5. External Religion vs. Interior Conversion

Newman warns that outward religious practice alone is not enough.

A person may:

- Fast
- Pray
- Give alms
- Attend devotions

Yet still resist true conversion of heart.

God does not judge only external observance, but interior sincerity.

True Lenten conversion requires:

- Honest self-examination
- Repentance of sin
- Concrete amendment of life

Key Question:

Has my religion truly changed my life?

6. The Cross as the Measure of True Conversion

For Newman, Lent always leads to the Cross.

The Cross reveals:

1. The seriousness of sin
2. The depth of God's love

If sin required the Passion of Christ, repentance cannot be superficial.

True conversion is shown not by emotion, but by perseverance:

- Prayer even when dry
- Penance even when difficult
- Repentance even when uncomfortable

Authentic Lent is steady, serious, and rooted in the Cross.

7. Key Spiritual Takeaways

- Lent is a season of urgency, not routine
- Grace is being offered now, not later
- Delayed repentance weakens the soul
- Conscience must be listened to and obeyed
- External practices must lead to interior change
- The Cross is the standard of true repentance

8. Personal Reflection Questions

- Where have I delayed conversion in my life?
- What truth about my soul have I been avoiding?
- Am I practicing religion externally but not changing internally?
- What sin or habit has my conscience repeatedly warned me about?
- Do I take Lent seriously as a time of salvation?

9. Weekly Lenten Resolution (Newman-Inspired)

Primary Resolution:

Schedule and make a sincere Confession during Lent.

Confession Date: _____

Secondary Resolution:

Identify ONE habit that must change now (not later).

My Lenten Reform:

Daily Prayer Intention:

10. Closing Spiritual Reminder

According to St. John Henry Newman, the greatest spiritual danger is not open rejection of God, but quiet delay in responding to His grace.

Lent is God’s merciful call to conversion.

Not tomorrow.

Not someday.

But now.

“Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation.”