

THE POPE GOES TO ENGLAND THIS WEEK

Dear Parishioners,

This week marks a very important event in the life of the Church Universal as the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, visits Great Britain from Thursday to Sunday. The Pontiff travels to Scotland and England at the invitation of Queen Elizabeth II herself. His is an official “state” visit – he is being received not only as a religious figure but as a world leader and head of Vatican City State. This will be the first such state visit of a pope to England in history.

England has a long relationship with Rome, having been evangelized by St. Augustine of Canterbury back in the 5th century, who was sent on mission by Pope Gregory. The island nation was a great jewel in the crown of the Holy Catholic Church until King Henry VIII broke with the Pope in 1526 over his divorce of his Spanish Queen Catherine of Aragon (who could be canonized one day, in my opinion). Henry ridiculously proclaimed himself the Head of the Church in England, and set off a killing spree that took wife after unsatisfactory wife, along with thousands of his subjects who remained faithful to the True Church.

In fits and starts England sputtered toward a hearty embrace of Protestantism and anti-Catholic bigotry. The Faithful were branded as “papists,” “recusants,” and were guilty of “popery.” The pope was burned in effigy each year on Guy Fawkes Day (which, incidentally, continued in America until George Washington put an end to it in his army). England’s nobles went on to ravage and despoil the monasteries and churches. The first Queen Elizabeth turned on her very own Catholic cousin, the beautiful Mary Queen of Scots, who had fled her Presbyterian enemies in Scotland seeking the English Queen’s protection. Elizabeth II, in one of history’s most dastardly deeds, committed regicide and had Queen Mary beheaded.

Now vicious Elizabeth’s namesake, the current monarch of the United Kingdom, has invited the very Vicar of Christ to her kingdom. This is quite an historic gesture. Pope Benedict will be holding several high level meetings: with the Queen, with the Anglican head Dr. Rowan Williams and with the Prime Minister. He will even address 1,000 Members of Parliament. One wonders what is stirring in England, so long the nemesis of the True Church. The numbers of Catholics there continue to grow. Vocations are up. Anglicans (including many of their priests and bishops) are converting to Catholicism in record numbers.

Yet England today can hardly be called a Christian, or even Protestant, country. It has been deeply secularized and its laws are increasingly anti-Christian. England led the way towards legalized abortion, euthanasia, research on the unborn, and institutionalized homosexuality. It is a place quite hostile to the Gospel.

While its English birthrate has for decades been below replacement level (the English are contracepting themselves into oblivion), Muslims have been pouring in to replace them from the far corners of the erstwhile British Empire.

Into this imbroglio the Vicar of Christ will venture. He must confront an organized campaign of bigots arrayed against him under the banner of, “Protest the Pope.” This is a sordid coalition of secularists, atheists and homosexuals. Anti-Catholic ads are being taken out on busses and on billboards. Anti-Catholic TV programs will coincide with the visit. Security will be very high, as threats against the Pontiff’s life are not lacking.

But another campaign is also underway – this one is designed to call down Heaven’s blessings on the visit through the Rosary, which will place Christ’s champion beneath the protective mantle of Our Lady.

On the final day of the visit a moment of great grace will occur as Pope Benedict beatifies the Ven. John Henry Cardinal Newman, the great 19th Century Anglican convert and Oxford don. Cdl. Newman was a giant of Catholicism and an able defender of the True Faith.

We must turn our attention to these important events this week, and lift up our hero and champion, Pope Benedict XVI, in prayers for his success and protection.

*Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam,
Father de Rosa*