

Dear Friends

First, a spiritual experience from the Westminster Pilgrimage. There were maybe 500 of us in the Abbey for Evensong. Outside there were 50,000 in Parliament Square, yelling about Brexit. In the Abbey, the choir sang a modern anthem which juxtaposed a well-known hymn (English words, familiar tune) with its Latin original (plainsong). The effect was to take us to a “thin” place where we could feel we had one foot in church-as-we-know-it, and the other in history; one foot in the world-as-we-know-it, and another in eternity with the Saints gone before. And in the breaks and quieter passages in the music, we could hear the throng of Brexit protesters outside. This did not sound hostile to me, or disruptive. It added another dimension. The Brexit protesters were also playing their part in the great movement of God’s Kingdom, in their way (whether they would see it like that or not). Now we also had one foot in the place of prayer, and the other in the place of uncomfortable political realities. And in all this, the peace of God.



The other spiritual experience of the weekend was to take part in the Ecumenical Vespers, in Birmingham’s Roman Catholic Cathedral, to celebrate the canonisation of St John Henry Newman. At the end I joined the queue of phone-wielding faithful, to venerate the newly blessed icon of the Saint, by taking a digital photo.

When invited to lead an All Saints school assembly at Glenmead, I decided to tell them about four Saints of Birmingham: **St Chad**, of course (whose relics repose above the altar in the photo); **Bishop Francis Asbury**, born in Hamstead, raised in Great Barr, and revered by American Methodists as their first Bishop; **St John Henry Newman**, whose first home in Birmingham was at Maryvale, on our doorstep; and **George Cadbury** whose faith inspired him to create a new Eden at Bournville.

Chad’s spiritual roots were in the old Celtic strand of the Church. Asbury was a Methodist. Newman, a Roman Catholic with roots in Anglicanism. And Cadbury a Quaker. This speaks volumes about the rich Christian heritage of Birmingham, and of our land.

Edward, King and Confessor of the faith, pray for our land at this critical time. Chad, Apostle of the Midlands, pray for us who labour for the Gospel here today. Francis, John Henry, and George, Saints of our age, show us the particular callings in which each of us shall serve God and our neighbours.

Your servant in Christ, Adam