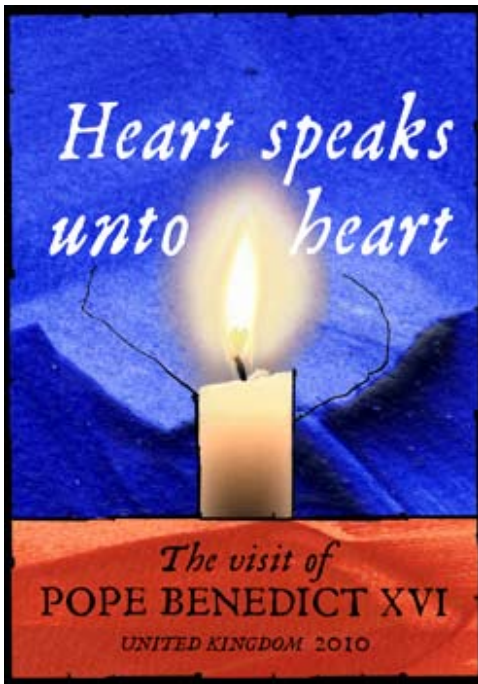


# Praying with Pope Benedict at **Cofton Park**



The occasion of Pope Benedict's visit to Birmingham; the beatification of Cardinal John Newman, was a deeply significant and religious one. Nevertheless, on arrival at Cofton Park, it soon became apparent that the gathering congregation was determined to make the celebration of Sunday mass a joyous event.

Despite the weather - British people love standing with plastic bags on their heads and it doesn't get more British than Birmingham - spirits were high (all 50,000 of them). Our Holy Father had laid the foundation stone of many bridges over the preceding few days and we were all there to give him thanks; to be proud of our faith and share a sense of real belonging.

Missionaries, monks and monsignors whirled their flags, clicked their cameras and raised their voices as enthusiastically as the rest of us and we all had a fantastic day.

**Anna Fischelt**



## Sunday, 19<sup>th</sup> September 2010

The Church of Our Lady pilgrims were greeted in the church early Sunday morning by Fr Allen who gamely stayed up to see us off.

As our church was the meeting place for others in the diocese, we were part of a larger group that set off in four coaches – at 01:45 a.m! We were in the coach with Fr Peter, the University College London chaplain, and a lot of students which somewhat worried me as I thought the young people would be interested in

staying up – and singing? - but that did not happen and Fr Peter after saying a prayer firmly said ‘good night’. Two hours later we pulled into a very large coach park and got out blearily to walk the short distance to Cofton Park. The good side of our early start was that we were able to pitch our seats (for those who had them!) in what turned out to be the front row of where the Pope went by in the Popemobile. This stroke of good luck fortified us for the many hours we had to wait before the 10:00 Mass began.

As dawn stole over the park the atmosphere was quiet and very good natured. There were all kinds of people, old, young and in-between and I felt strongly that we were all happy to be there. Our group had met up with Sister Matthias from Tyburn Convent. Sister wears a traditional religious habit and this turned out to be irresistible to the photographers: we were beginning to think that a charge should be made for ‘image rights’ as snap after snap was taken!



When the Pope’s helicopter was pointed out to us (rather against the rules I imagine) by the security man I certainly felt a sense of excitement. Before too long the Pope was passing in front of us in the Popemobile smiling and waving. It was special.

The Mass itself and all the music especially was extremely well organized and thought out. The *Magnificat* book proved essential.

There were many nice touches like the



bidding prayers being read by six different people in German, French, Welsh, Irish, Vietnamese, and Punjabi (languages spoken in the UK). The altar and platform was largely white and the many priests in their white surplices made a striking image with the Pope and celebrating clergy centre stage. The distribution of communion to the approximately 50,000 people at the Mass was conducted with proper reverence, and efficiency. Most of the hymns sung were those using Cardinal Newman's words. The contemporary Scottish (Catholic) composer James Macmillan wrote a new Mass for the occasion which was easy to sing since the music was in the *Magnificat* book – and even if you don't read music (and I don't) you could follow the up and down notes adequately. At least I think you could – I wouldn't want to ask my neighbours what they thought of my singing!

I am very happy that I attended the Mass and thank my companions, Anna Fischelt, Gabrielle Summa, Chibuzor Uchea – and the photogenic Sister Matthias - for sharing a uniquely special occasion.

**Anne-Lucie Norton**







