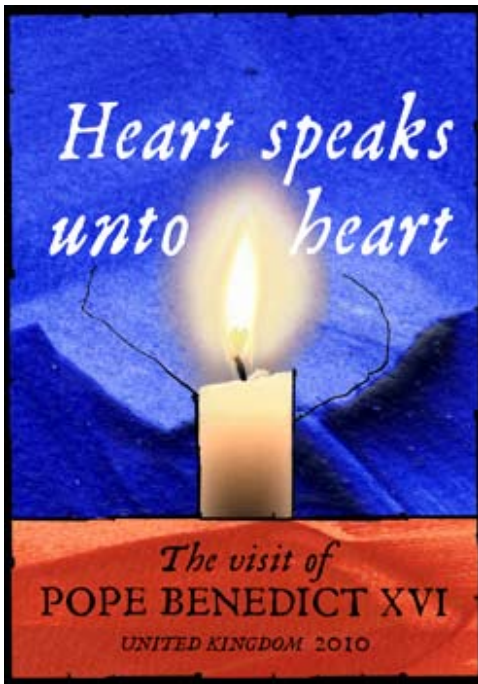


Praying with Pope Benedict at **Hyde Park**



Popetastic

On 18th September 2010 I was one of two individuals from our parish privileged to attend Pope Benedict XVI's Prayer Vigil at Hyde Park as an "Invited Pilgrim" and representative of our diocese of Westminster. This status meant that I was permitted to sit in the restricted area of the venue, right in front of the stage where the altar was located.

This area accommodated about 250 people and at the back were different groups of young people from all over the UK. The excitement from these youngsters all dressed in bright coloured tee-shirts of red, orange, green, blue, yellow and pink was infectious and very vocal. As we watched the big screens showing the Pope's journey from near the houses of Parliament to Hyde Park the venue resonated with



cheers and the crowd's voices singing a refrain: "Here comes the Pope" that reached a crescendo upon his Holiness' arrival.

Prior to the Pope's arrival the youth groups had processed onto the stage to greet the bishops to a catholic selection of different music which highlighted the multi-cultural diversity of London. We then heard extremely moving personal stories of how Catholicism had influenced different people's lives. I was especially touched by a lady asylum-seeker's story of how her parish priest had arranged for her to attend Sunday services via "Skype" (where a computer allows you to see what is going on in another location at the same time that it is actually happening) and the strength this action had instilled in the family at a time of extreme hardship when they had been held in an immigration detention centre. It epitomised how we Catholics will go the extra mile to assist and support those less fortunate than ourselves.





Another personal experience which brought tears to my eyes was the story of one family's response to the death of their 16 year old son who had died as a result of a vicious attack in a laundrette near his home. The parents gave rousing personal testimonies of how their faith in God had enabled them to forgive the perpetrator this terrible crime and exchange their anger for love.

When the Pope arrived in the gathering dusk, amid the floodlights and the candles, he referred to the Tyburn martyrs who had suffered for their faith by being cruelly executed. The Pope's message was to encourage us to remain robust in our faith despite sometimes being ridiculed or

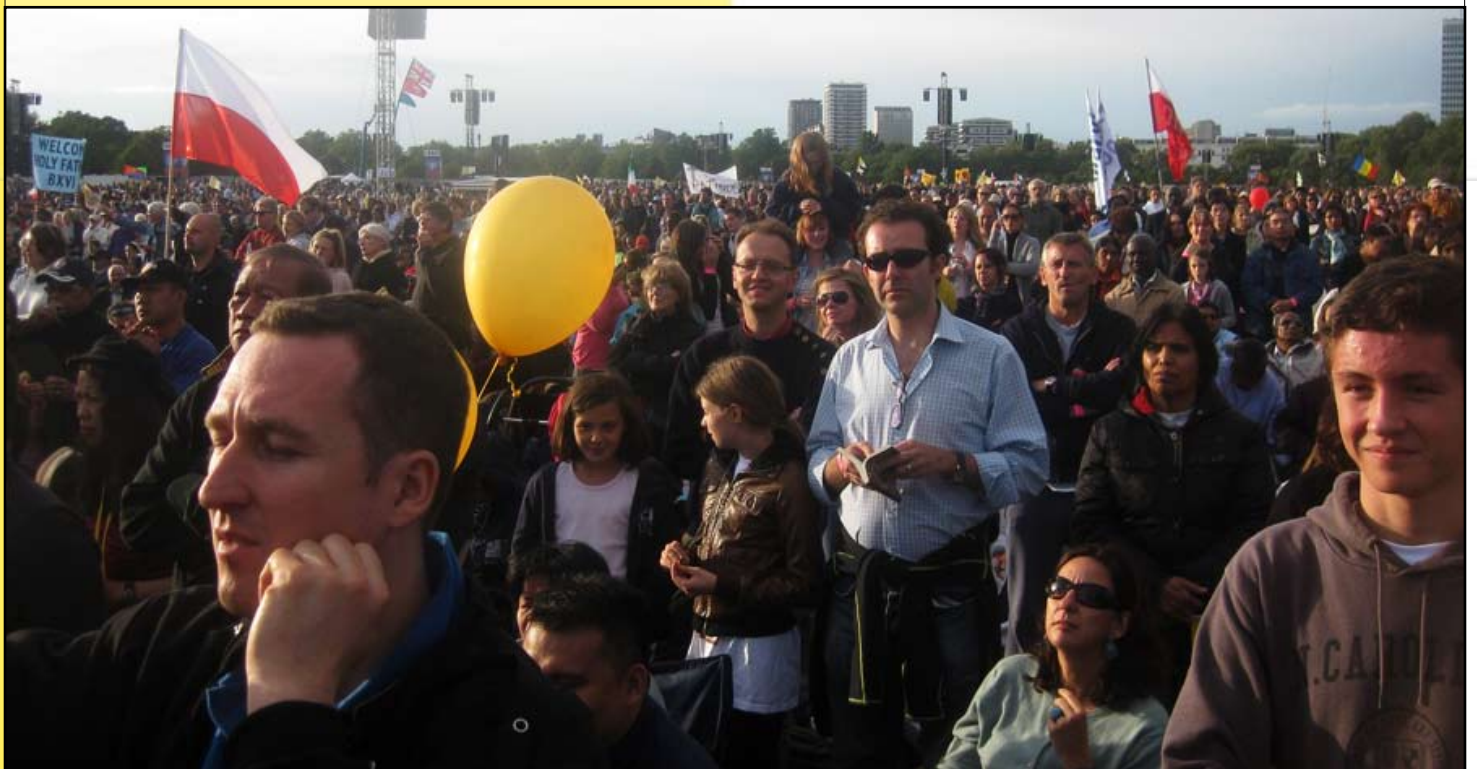
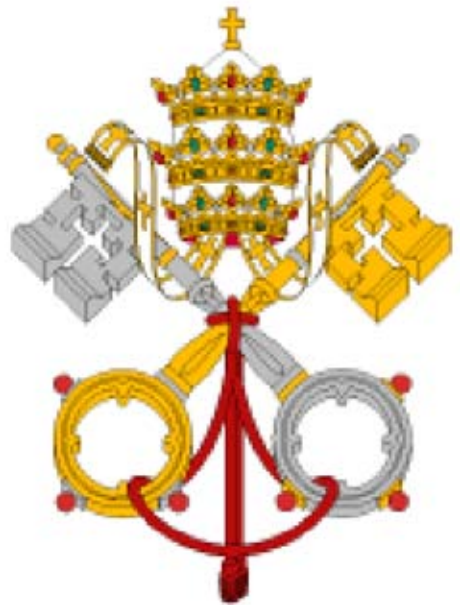
parodied. The Pope then went on to talk about the light that Cardinal John Henry Newman had shone on Catholicism and how our prayer vigil was in preparation for the next day's mass where Newman would be beatified.

By the end of the evening I was outwardly chilled – as night drew on - but inwardly warmed by the Pope's appearance and words of wisdom. I came away from the vigil with a huge feeling of inward tranquillity and solidarity with other Catholics who had attended the event. It was an honour and a privilege to represent our diocese at this vigil and see the Pope in such close proximity; it was a once in a lifetime experience that I will treasure for the rest of my life.

Francoise Balfe



Photos from a Murphy Family 'Day to Remember'





More photos from a Murphy Family 'Day to Remember'

