

Trip to UK, beatification of Newman in 2010 a 'good hypothesis'

John L. Allen Jr. | Sep. 27, 2009

By JOHN L. ALLEN JR.

Prague

In a briefing with reporters this evening in the Czech capital, Vatican spokesperson Fr. Federico Lombardi stopped short of official confirmation of a rumored papal trip to Great Britain for 2010, but suggested that it's likely. He added that such a trip would be an "obvious occasion" for the beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman.

Lombardi also said that outings in 2010 to both Malta and Portugal are in the works, but that preparations still have to be made.

The Malta trip, set for April, has already been announced by the Maltese bishops. It will commemorate the 1,950th anniversary of St. Paul's famous shipwreck on the Mediterranean island. The pontiff's trip to Portugal has likewise been quasi-official for some time, set for the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima on May 13.

Lombardi said that the main organizer of papal travel, Alberto Gasparri, has not yet worked out the details of trips to either location.

News broke earlier this week of a possible outing to Great Britain and Ireland, which could include a beatification ceremony for Newman, the 19th century intellectual and convert to Catholicism who has long been slightly controversial for his ambivalence about the doctrine of papal infallibility.

Nonetheless, Pope Benedict XVI has frequently praised Newman's life and work, seeing in him a kindred intellectual spirit.

Lombardi said this evening that a trip to the U.K. is a "good hypothesis," that it would likely take place in September (rather than January as some news outlets had suggested), and that "it would be an obvious occasion" to beatify Newman.

When a reporter noted that Benedict XVI has previously expressed a preference to allow beatifications to be carried out by the local church rather than by the pope, Lombardi responded: "We have a year to figure that out."

Pope Benedict XVI today completed the second day of his three-day stop in the Czech Republic. Tomorrow the pontiff will celebrate Mass for the national festival of St. Wenceslas and meet with youth before returning to Rome in the evening.