

MASS FOR FEAST OF ST ANDREW
30 NOVEMBER 2011

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I suspect that I do not need to tell you of the great joy I feel at being able to celebrate this Mass for you on the feast of our national patron, St Andrew, in this newly restored Cathedral Church which is dedicated to him, for the first time since its re-opening.

That joy is shared by the Chapter of Canons here with me fulfilling their proper role in the Cathedral Church, reciting the office of the day in choir and assisting the Bishop in the liturgy.

And I imagine for you too it is a great day.

The Catholic Church in Scotland has made no secret of the fact that it strongly wishes this day to be made a national holiday every year. The idea has recently been taken up by marketing gurus who say that Scotland is “missing a trick” by not making more of its national patron. They point to the commercial opportunities afforded by St Patrick’s Day celebrations for the Irish economy and tell us that Scotland could do well too, by making more of its patron saint.

While the economic logic may or may not be compelling – it is not an area of competence for the Church to decide – my belief is that the cultural and spiritual case for a national saint’s day IS compelling.

Scotland is a nation with an ancient history, and that history is inextricably formed in the shape of the cross; the cross of St Andrew.

From early times there has been a great pride among Scots of their heavenly patron. Indeed we read in the 700 year old text of the Declaration of Arbroath:

“The high qualities and deserts of these people, were they not otherwise manifest, gain glory enough from this: that the King of kings and Lord of lords,

our Lord Jesus Christ, after His Passion and Resurrection, called them, even though settled in the uttermost parts of the earth, almost the first to His most holy faith.

“Nor would He have them confirmed in that faith by merely anyone but by the first of His Apostles by calling - though second or third in rank - the most gentle Saint Andrew, the Blessed Peter's brother, and desired him to keep them under his protection as their patron forever.”

And addressing the Pope, then in Avignon, the writers added: “The Most Holy Fathers your predecessors gave careful heed to these things and bestowed many favours and numerous privileges on this same kingdom and people, as being the special charge of the Blessed Peter's brother.”

To this day the St Andrew's Cross is a flag which all Scots hoist with pride, and the emblem of our patron is emblazoned on many buildings and coats of arms, logos and letterheads across our country.

And so it seems logical that we should mark our dear saint – the first of the apostles to be called by Christ – through a properly recognised national holiday.

However such a holiday cannot be allowed to become an occasion for empty tokenism; merely an occasion for the trumpetblast of “wha's like us” and a nostalgic wrapping of ourselves in tartan.

Rather a feast day should remind us of the person whose life is being recalled, and the message of that person for us - here and now.

St Andrew's life is well known, at least in outline. A worker – perhaps a small business owner - with his brother Peter in the fishing fleet of the Sea of Galilee, he followed Christ without hesitation, remaining faithful after the death and resurrection of the Lord even to the shedding of his own blood in martyrdom at Achaia in modern day Greece.

The quality that stands out in his life is fidelity. Fidelity to Christ.

St Paul is very strong on that theme in today's epistle. There we read quite clearly: "If your lips confess that Jesus is Lord and if you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you will be saved"

Those words are very clear. But a little later in the reading we hear expressed the nagging doubt that perhaps lingers at the back of our own minds when faced with such initial confidence ...

"Not everyone of course listens to the Good News. As Isaiah says: 'Lord, how many believed what we proclaimed?'

"So faith comes from what is preached, and what is preached comes from the word of Christ."

Today in Scotland the Catholic Church continues to preach the word of Christ in season and out of season, be its reception popular or unpopular.

In Edinburgh, Cardinal O'Brien has launched an initiative called "Scotland for Marriage". This is an umbrella group being set up to remind politicians that some issues are not negotiable; marriage being one of them.

Marriage, between one man and one woman is a fundamental building block of our culture and cannot be tampered with, without doing damage to the foundations and infrastructure of society.

As the Cardinal said: "As an institution, marriage long predates the existence of any state or government. It was not created by government and should not be changed by them. Instead, recognising the innumerable benefits which marriage brings to society they should act to protect and uphold it not attack or dismantle it."

And so, if I repeat once more the call today for St Andrew's Day to be made a national holiday, I do so with the warning that it must not be a meaningless gesture, or an occasion devoid of substance.

Rather St Andrew's Day should remind us of the Christian heritage of our society; of its history which is formed and forged on the anvil of Christian life. It is a day for remembering with pride our nationhood, but also for remembering with pride our Christian culture which crafted it.

As the visitor heads north along the Via Cassia out of Rome, leaving the historic centre of the city behind, he or she is confronted with a bold phrase picked out on the gable wall of a modern building close to the area of Nero's tomb.

It reads "*Salve me bona crux*" – save me good cross. The motto in question and the wall in question belong to the Pontifical Scots College, where for 411 years men have followed Christ's call in the footsteps of Andrew.

That motto is now carved here too, in our own Cathedral, on the face of the newly dedicated altar.

It should be carved also on our hearts as Scots men and women.

Salva me bona crux!

May we never grow tired of our faith, may we never lose the healthy love of our nation which marks us out, and may we never forget the culture that is ours as Scots – a culture reaching back to the shores of the Sea of Galilee and the selfless fidelity of a fisherman who went on to become a fisher of men.

Amen