

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today we celebrate the Red Mass, where we give a cordial welcome to the Lord President, Lord Gill, Lord Advocate Mulholland, Lord Matthews, Lord Doherty, Lady Rae, Justice Murray from Dublin, Deemster Doyle from the Isle of Man, Dean of Faculty, the President of the Law Society and the W.S. Society, as well as senior law officers of Scotland as they commence the new legal year in these days.

Their existence as a separate judiciary from that of England and Wales is an ongoing reminder to all of us of Scotland's distinct political and legal identity, one that goes back many centuries. You know you are all very welcome here.

It's a happy coincidence that you are present for the Mass only days after the momentous event of the Referendum on Scottish independence, and you help to show all of us, by your presence, the reality of who we are as a polity and the important legal means by which we protect and defend the various aspects of our civil and political life.

Scotland's history in this sense mirrors the story of many European peoples. I came across a Bishop just a couple of days ago when I was in Rome, who was recounting in a meeting a very odd little fact, perhaps better a factoid. He said that he used to be an archivist and that the oldest book he looked after (the oldest book in Poland? I think he said that...) was a book written by an Irish monk who lived in the great monastery of Bobbio, in Italy. The book was brought from there to Poland by a missionary who was German. Just over a thousand years ago, the German went and founded the Polish diocese where the book is found today.

Now, this got me thinking about the nature of Christianity in Scotland as well. Our principle patron Saints in Scotland are practically none of them from Scotland. St Ninian who goes back to the 4th Century: well, we're not sure where he was from; he was a Briton of some kind. St Columba, our former national patron, was from what is today's Northern Ireland. St Margaret, who is the nation's secondary patron, was an Anglo-Saxon princess. And St Andrew, our principal national patron, was a Galilean fisherman.

So the roots of the Catholic faith in Scotland do not necessarily depend primarily upon the Scots at all, but upon someone else bringing the Good News from outside to Scotland, someone who is not necessarily a Scot at all. And this is something that has been mirrored throughout the centuries of the spread of the Gospel.

This got me thinking two things. First, the Gospel knows no frontiers. It doesn't really pay much attention to nations or to where borders are. Secondly, the Gospel message is for everyone, it's for all peoples, no matter what nation they belong to. The Gospel also forms and informs civil and legal discourse, and as a Christian I believe that it does so for the benefit of all people in the communities that it touches. I've seen this and lived in many developing countries, much younger than Scotland, and I think it's a demonstrable fact in history.

Christianity and its message often have their original success because they are from one point of view a call to essential virtue. The Gospel is a call to the natural virtues recognised throughout the ancient world, what we call the natural virtues of fortitude, justice, prudence and temperance. Christianity adds and as it were completes these natural virtues with the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.

As Christianity spread through Europe it did so slowly. Occasionally, it's true that it spread with the eventual collaboration of princes and statesman and states, but it only really started to be popular and widespread and dig deep roots because, slowly and surely, it actually convinced people.

It wasn't by coercion that it spread, but by persuasion, the persuasion of witness, not words; the persuasion of the witness of individuals who lived an attractive, that is to say, a virtuous way of life. We all know the saying "Goodness is its own reward", and virtue attracts and encourages others to virtue. And virtues just like the Gospel message itself look to our own common humanity no matter where we live and no matter where the borders of our country are, yesterday, today or tomorrow.

Here today, after the Referendum, there is a great deal to do, to build our nation, to reconcile those who oppose where we now stand with those who passionately have defended it. There was an energetic debate over these days. There was a great turnout, the likes of which has not been seen in living memory. There was a clear decision at the end of it. And there was an exemplary democratic process. I am very proud of all of them, of all of you.

All Christians, through their faith and its call to civil and religious virtue, stand ready to help build and to help reconcile wherever necessary. I think we are all proud to belong to this country. I think I can say without fear of contradiction that, no matter where its borders finish, we are happy to belong to this country and to this community and to this Church. So I encourage all of you to do everything by prayer and by action that you can, under God, to make this a nation where everyone is respected, loved and promoted.

We pray that our civil leaders, including those here present from the legal profession, will lead us all into the way of peace, and we ask God to bless our beloved homeland with peace and harmony, and with a polity and a prosperity that is good for us - and for all our neighbours.