St. Andrew Mistaken for a Scotsman

Cardinal Laments Ignorance of Country's Patron

EDINBURGH, Scotland, NOV. 30, 2009 -

St. Andrew is Scotland's patron, not Scotland's native son, affirmed Cardinal Keith O'Brien as the nation prepared to celebrate the national holiday.

The archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh wrote this in an article published in the Sunday Times, in which he lamented the results of a poll that found that almost half the country thinks of St. Andrew as Scottish.



The cardinal described the finding as "nothing short of alarming," and urged Catholics to remember that the holiday, which the country observes today, is more than parades and festivities.

"The celebration of the feast of St. Andrew has taken place in Scotland since earliest times and, indeed, Scotland should feel honored to have Andrew, a fisherman from Galilee who was Jesus' second apostle, as its patron saint," he said. "However, how many Scots today are familiar with the religious history and significance of St Andrew?"

There is a "widespread lack of understanding," the cardinal said, and the interest in St. Andrew has recently "revolved around the secular idea of a national holiday."

"We would do well to remember that what is seen today as a 'holiday' started life as a 'holy day,'" Cardinal O'Brien pointed out, "and, despite the welcome presence of many new faiths in our society, Scotland remains at heart a Christian country."

If this day is turned into a secular event only, he warned, "it would become no different from the empty bells and jingles that signify Christmas without Christ or the festival of chocolate, which is all that's left of Easter without the Resurrection."

"We must not allow any future generations of Scottish children to grow up in this country without some rudimentary knowledge of their patron," the cardinal affirmed.

"Teachers must be given greater scope to retell the history of our patron saint -- our education system should never pander to misguided and baseless fears that in doing so we may upset

members of other faiths," he added.

Secularism and prayer

"While civic events are useful, spiritual action is crucial," the prelate said. "It is in prayer and worship that we truly honor St. Andrew.

"On many occasions in recent years I have spoken about the growth of secularism in our society; St. Andrew's day gives us an opportunity to counter this with prayers to our patron saint."

"We should ask for his intercession for the good of our country," the archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh stated, "and in so doing illustrate to all Scots in our increasingly multicultural nation part of the Christian identity and ethos which makes us who we are."

"St. Andrew's Day, should be Scotland's national day of prayer, for our nation, our people and our future," he added.

The prelate explained that St. Andrew was a fisherman from Galilee who became Jesus' Apostle, and is "believed to have been martyred at Patras in Greece on Nov. 30 in the year 60 on a diagonal or saltire cross."

The legend is that St. Regulus, a Greek monk, brought the bones of the apostle to Scotland in the 4th century, the cardinal affirmed.

This legend, he continued, was used "by medieval Scottish kings" to "authenticate the apostle as patron saint of Scotland, thus giving our nation a top-rank patron saint and a separate identity from England."

The relics were kept in the town of St. Andrews until June 1559, when the cathedral where they were housed was destroyed by the crowd of reformers accompanying John Knox into the city.

Cardinal O'Brien affirmed that this was the last tangible link between his country and the saint until 1879, when "the archbishop of Amalfi [Italy] gifted one of his relics to St. Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh."

In 1969, Pope Paul VI gave the archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh, then Cardinal Gordon Joseph Gray, with a second relic of St. Andrew. Both relics are now housed in St. Mary's Cathedral, where Pope John Paul II visited and prayed in 1982.

"Sadly," Cardinal O'Brien concluded, "little of this fascinating history is widely known in this country. Before we celebrate another St. Andrew's Day, I hope we will have begun to change that." (Zenit)