

**MASS MARKING EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL**  
**ST MARY'S METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL EDINBURGH**  
**HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN**  
**SUNDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2009**

**INTRODUCTION:**

I initially welcome you all to this Mass marking our Edinburgh International Festival. I extend a particularly warm welcome to the First Citizen of Edinburgh, the Lord Provost George Grubb and his wife Elizabeth, attended by the High Constables of the City of Edinburgh and the city Officers. I know that there are very many other representatives of our City and our country here – especially those who serve our city as Councillors along with their families and friends.

Over the years invariably this Mass in our Metropolitan Cathedral follows on the Sunday after the opening service of our Festival in St Giles Cathedral. However I asked that this Mass be postponed by one Sunday because of other engagements which I was fulfilling outwith of Scotland – and our Lord Provost graciously agreed. I thank him most sincerely for this.

**FESTIVAL PERFORMANCES IN WHICH WE HAVE SHARED:**

Over these weeks of Festival in our city so far there have been great crowds of people attending. Thousands have shared in some of the uplifting concerts; the enthralling drama; the much appreciated art, and the great variety of the Festival Fringe. Perhaps what has affected most of us day by day including of course the citizens of Edinburgh has been what I described in St Giles as the “companionship of the crowd” when there are hundreds of thousands of visitors to our city and to our country. Hopefully we have grown in our appreciation of very many things over these weeks of the festival and the week which lies ahead – especially the realisation that we are all members of one human race, having shared joys and sorrows, and hopefully a deeper appreciation of just who and what we are.

**A TIME FOR THOUGHT:**

I wonder though if at this festival time we give ourselves certain valuable “space” – a space just to think of ourselves, and to try to appreciate what is going on around us at this present time.

I myself had two “periods of space” away from Edinburgh – one accounting for my non availability in the city last Sunday.

The first “period of space” was when I was leading our annual **Archdiocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes** at the beginning of July. In Lourdes I was in the presence of hundred of thousands of pilgrims from all over the world including approximately five hundred from our own Archdiocese including a large number of sick fellow pilgrims. The liturgies which we celebrated involved usually a very large number of people including an international Mass in the vast underground Basilica in Lourdes involving some tens of thousands.

You might wonder just where there was “space” in all of this – but I assure you that there was. There were those periods of times in the silence of the grotto in which it is believed that Our Blessed Lady appeared to St Bernadette; there were those valuable periods of silence in the midst of a Mass or other solemn liturgies; and there were those times of peace and quiet in our own rooms or in a hospital bed.

And last Sunday I was preaching in Ireland at the **annual National Pilgrimage in Ireland** to another shrine of Our Blessed Lady – that at Knock in Co Mayo. Again there is a vast Basilica there in which I was privileged to celebrate Mass on two occasions preaching at both again to tens of thousands of pilgrims. At the first Mass I took part in the anointing of the sick from all over Ireland; and at the second took part in a beautiful torch light procession. But again there were those valued periods of silence which gave me the opportunity to think more – about God and my relationship with him, about my people and how together we could grow in our love of God and of one another.

### **LOURDES PLAY – VISION:**

So much of what I had seen and was part of in Lourdes and then of what was to come in Knock became real for me at one of the **Festival performances** which I thoroughly enjoyed – perhaps some of you shared in it. It was a musical play on the Fringe celebrated by the St Ives Youth Theatre from Cambridgeshire in one of the facilities at the Edinburgh College of Art. There are some sixty members of the Youth Theatre equally mixed boys and girls, young men and young women, and all are volunteers seeking to entertain others. **Their musical called ‘Vision’** tells the story of St Bernadette of Lourdes through the eyes of young people in the Lourdes of today and was very well received in Edinburgh as indeed in Liverpool when the European City of Culture. It was indeed a spectacular performance full of youthful energy and vigour – and which gave me and many others much pause for thought and prayer during the performance. The whole event of Lourdes was seen through the eyes of two young hitch hikers who had “come upon” Lourdes by mistake and then were caught up in the whole event. The most moving part for me was at the end when one of the hitch hikers moved on to pastures new, while the other remained behind captivated by all that he had heard and seen. I myself thought and said to the young performers afterwards that this final reflection at the end of the musical perhaps affected their own lives caught up in the performance. I indicated that perhaps some of those performing will continue to move on to varying careers. On the other hand others will ponder deeply upon the events which they had been portraying for such wonderful audiences.

### **EFFECTS ON US:**

I would like to think that as we are nearing the end of our International Festival and performers and audiences are returning home that there would indeed be some time for reflection. I would like to think that Sunday by Sunday as we attend Mass or services in our own churches that weekly there would be a similar time for pondering and reflection. In our ever more busy world “space for ourselves” is inevitably crushed out – and we all seem to work and relax at an evermore frenzied pace.

**What has this year’s festival meant for us – if anything!** What affect have the hundreds of thousands of visitors had on us in our Capital City? What affect have the performances had on ourselves and on our lives.

And perhaps our weekly reflection should also ask how have we benefited or otherwise by our attendance at our weekly service or Mass? What affect have the readings from scripture or our sharing in Holy Communion made on our Christian lives during the week?

In the Old Testament reading of today's Mass from the Book of Deuteronomy Moses told the people of Israel to: "Take notice of the laws and customs that I teach you today and observe them". Each week we have the opportunity to think of the laws of God handed down through those described as our elder brothers and sisters in the faith, namely the Jewish people.

And similarly with the teaching of Jesus handed on to us weekly through the Gospel writers. In the passage from today's Gospel, Jesus speaks harshly to those who "put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions". How often does this apply to us?

In this world of increasing change, in this world where our Christian values are so often put aside by others including those in positions of responsibility we must consider week by week our **Christian responsibility in our homes, in our communities and in our country.**

### **CONCLUSION:**

Let us together thank God for all that has been happening and is happening in our Capital City at this present time. Let us thank God for the beauty which we have appreciated and for the lessons we have learned.

And let us be evermore determined to continue to grow in our learning; to grow in the appreciation of the Word of God handed on to us; and let us pray that we may apply that Word, the teachings of the Old Testament along with the ongoing teaching of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. May that be the light which guides us along the way throughout our lives here on earth.