

LOURDES REUNION MASS

*I have made you a light for the nations so that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth.* Recently there's been much discussion about the EU and Britain's continued membership and we can be sure this will be a hot topic in the forthcoming General Election. The EU began after the War in 1951 and today it comprises 28 countries from East and West, with others seeking to join. Listening to the politicians arguing for and against, it's easy to forget that before the 16C Protestant Reformation, Europe, with all its differing cultures and languages, was once totally united by that which is deepest in the human person: religion. Though sadly since 1054 there'd been a schism, even so all the peoples of Europe from the Balkans to Ireland, from Scandinavia to Greece, were totally united by a common faith and a common baptism. It's for their part in this that we thank God today for the two brothers, SS. Cyril and Methodius. Living in 9C, they evangelised, with the Pope's blessing, large parts of Eastern Europe from Bulgaria to Hungary, bringing with them lasting elements of civilisation. We honour them as *The Co-Patrons of Europe* for it's thanks to them that in those far-off lands, as 1stR said, *the Word of the Lord spread through the whole countryside.*

I'm happy to celebrate with you this Lourdes Reunion Mass. I'm sure we'd all agree our pilgrimage last summer was a wonderful experience with many happy memories and much to thank God for. It was great to have so many young pilgrims with us. I especially remember visiting the sick and their carers in the *Accueil*, the meals in the *Hotel Mercure*, not to forget the bar in the evening where we drank many magnas of *Leffe Blonde*! We are all deeply grateful to Fr. John, Fr. Vincent, Clare and those who organised our trip so superbly. We pray for them, and the Association members with whom we went. To me, one of the great beauties of Lourdes is its international character, visible at the Grotto, in the Torchlight Procession and the underground Mass. Lourdes makes us thank God for being Catholic, that we belong to the universal Church, which is one in doctrine, life and worship. That's why today, rightly we ask the prayers of SS. Cyril and Methodius, that the peoples of Europe might once again be united by a common faith and baptism.

*Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome ... cure those in it who are sick, and say, "The kingdom of God is very near to you."* In a moment, we are going to fulfil those words of Jesus in the Gospel in a real way, by celebrating the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick for those in need of it. This is not just ministry *to* the sick but ministry *OF* the sick: we care for the sick, anointing them with the Holy Spirit, in order to help them unite their sufferings with those of Christ on Calvary *for our good and the good of all His Holy Church.* As the Gospels say, the sick used to go to Our Lord for healing and through the Apostle James, he commanded us that if any are sick, they should send for the priests of the Church. Let the priests of the Church pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick persons and the Lord will raise them up, and if they have committed any sins, their sins will be forgiven them. So in this Mass now, let us commend all the sick, especially those here present, to the grace and power of Christ that He may save them and raise them up. And as we do so, let us call on the prayers of SS. Cyril and Methodius, St. Bernadette, St. Joseph, and, above all, the Blessed Mother, Mary Health of the Sick, Our Lady of Lourdes.