It is very appropriate that you should have a foreigner to speak to you today on this celebration of St Cyril and St Methodius  - those two foreigners who came to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the Slavic peoples. And also that you invite a Benedictine monk – because St Benedict is the patron of our part of Europe just as Cyril and Methodius are the patrons of yours.

A couple of weeks ago I was in some very strange places! Nitra, Bratislava Spisska Capitular and many others. It was my third or fourth visit to Slovakia. Slovakia is an amazing place. It is stunningly beautiful, wonderfully rural and green and the mountains are so magnificent that they take your breath away. If ever I leave the monastery I could work for a Slovak tourist organisation. I would make some great publicity for you!

When I visit Slovakia I begin to understand how easy it is for you Slovaks to love your country. It is a country with great character and with a great history and culture. You have so much that we in the west of Europe have lost – your village customs and national dress, your food, and many other things! Then there are all those things that an Englishman will never understand – putting the fish in the bath before Christmas – throwing water over women on Easter Monday, May poles in the gardens of the girls. What strange people you are!

Each one of you here has come to England for a different reason. Perhaps work, perhaps study, perhaps family, but you keep in your hearts a bit of Slovakia – you know that your true homeland is under the Tatras mountains and you know that the mountains will always be in your heart and your heart will always be in the mountains. This is how exiles feel. However, being far from home can teach us something about God.

Because we have another homeland – and that is heaven. We are all exiles from heaven which is our true home – to which we hope to go when we die. And wherever we are on this earth we should always in our hearts a desire a thirst to be with God in heaven. And we should live in simplicity and prayer, and make all our decisions in life with heaven in mind.

This thirst for God is what we celebrate today in remembering St Cyril and St Methodius, the *Apostoli Slavorum* Apostles of the Slavs. These two brothers answered the call of God and the call of the Slavic peoples to come and be their apostles – to preach the gospel to them.

They had a very hard time preaching that gospel, not because of the people who were naturally thirsty for the good news of Jesus Christ, but because of politics and governments, because of the poetics and jealousies within the church. Bad letters were written about them filled with lies. They suffered greatly for their faith but kept their eyes on Jesus and the gospel and steadily and carefully continued their mission.

They preached in the ninth century things which have endured to the 21st – precious treasures which you should be very proud of. The Catholic faith – a profound union with and love for Rome, and most of all the gift of the gospel. We don’t know how much of the bible they translated – Cyril was a great linguist – he knew Arabic and Hebrew as well as Greek. When he was given the job of converting the Slavs he used his language gifts to devise the alphabet so that it could be written down. And so the Slavic nations have a very particular gift– the Slavic languages were written down for one purpose – the preaching of the gospel. Every time you open your mouth to say a word – you must thank Ss Cyril and St Methodius for their work in making your language sacred a language written for the praise of God and the preaching of the gospel.

When you are next in Slovakia – keep in mind that the ground there is consecrated – made holy by the footsteps of those two holy brothers all those centuries ago. Make sure you have lots of Euros with their picture – even though some in the European Union have tried to take away the holy cross from it. And be proud of your country and tradition. But you also must remember what a tradition is. A tradition is something handed on down the ages, a link in a chain. The chain has held strong through many troubled times. You are the links today. Keep your hearts in the mountains breathing the best things of your country- faith and family – even while your feet are walking around London! Be strong and be faithful to the gospel, and may St Cyril and St Methodius  pray for us all.