

5th Week in Lent
March 17, 2016
Genesis 17:3–9/Psalm 105:4–9/John 8:51–59

In 461 Saint Palladius died. He had been the missionary to Ireland. At the time Patrick was about 46 years old. In a dream vision it seemed “all the children of Ireland from their mothers’ wombs were stretching out their hands” to him. He understood the vision to be a call to do mission work in pagan Ireland. Despite opposition from those who felt his education had been defective, he was sent to carry out the task. He went to the west and north, where the faith had never been preached, obtained the protection of local kings and made numerous converts. By the time of his death, 31 years later in 492, (He was 77), he could see the fruits of his work: a native clergy was in place, Christianity had reached nearly all of Ireland and churches and monasteries had been established.

Towards the end of his *Confessio*, a spiritual autobiography, we are given insight into St. Patrick’s Catholic faith that ties in with our readings for today.

Here is a quote that articulates the hope that I think would have upheld Patrick’s life:

Sufficient is the honour which is not yet seen, but in which the heart has confidence. He who made the promise is faithful; he never lies.

Patrick expresses an abiding trust in God, trusting him for the work that will be accomplished in Ireland, the fruit of which would grow after his death. Just like Abram in our Old Testament Lesson. In this passage his name changes from “Abram” which means, “exalted father”, to Abraham which mean “father of a multitude of nations.” Here Abraham trusts that God will use him in ways that would only be fully understood hundreds of years after his death. That is, through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. St Patrick, as a bishop, would have understood that the fulfillment of this blessing was intricately tied to the Church. For it would be through the Church that nation after nation would be brought into the fold of Christ’s universal flock. It would be in the Catholic Church that every nation would find a home. Patrick knew that it was the call on his life to ensure this for the Irish. So he wrote directly to the Irish people about his mission.

More, I spent for you so that they would receive me. And I went about among you, and everywhere for your sake, in danger, and as far as the outermost regions beyond which no one lived, and where no one had ever penetrated before, to baptize or to ordain clergy or to confirm people. Conscientiously and gladly I did all this work by God’s gift for your salvation.

What motivated Patrick in the present was his sure confidence in the future. He took to heart the words of Jesus in today’s Gospel:

Very truly I tell you, whoever keeps my words will never taste death.

Now listen to Patrick’s confident words, with Jesus’ words in mind:

For beyond any doubt on that day we shall rise again in the brightness of the sun, that is, in the glory of Christ Jesus our Redeemer, as children of the living God and co-heirs of Christ, made in his image; for we shall reign through him and for him and in him. We shall not die, who believe in and worship the true sun, Christ, who will never die, no more shall he die who has done Christ's will, but will abide for ever just as Christ abides for ever, who reigns with God the Father Almighty and with the Holy Spirit before the beginning of time and now and for ever and ever. Amen.

Today we remember Patrick, the Bishop of Missionary to Ireland. We celebrate and give thanks for a man who understood how central the Catholic Church is to the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. We celebrate a man who so trusted in Jesus Christ that everything he did in the present was informed by eternity and the assurance of Jesus' promise:

Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.

May this prayer attributed to Patrick inspire us to live with the same Christ like dedication and focus:

“Christ shield me this day: Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every person who thinks of me, Christ in the eye that sees me, Christ in the ear that hears me”

St Patrick prayer for us that we may live with the same whole hearted devotion so as to fulfill our mission in this life as we anticipate the glory of the world that is to come!