

St Patrick – An Inspiration for our day

March 17th 2021

St Patrick was a humble missionary (this saint regularly referred to himself as “a sinner”) of enormous courage. When he evangelized Ireland, he set in motion a series of events that impacted all of Europe. It all started when he was carried off into slavery by Irish raiders.

A 16-year-old Romanized Briton, Patrick was sold to a cruel warrior chief whose opponents’ heads sat atop sharp poles around his palisade in Northern Ireland. While Patrick minded his master’s pigs in the nearby hills, he lived like an animal himself, enduring long bouts of hunger, thirst, and isolation. A nominal Christian to this point, he now turned to the Christian God of his fathers for comfort.

“I would pray constantly during the daylight hours,” he later recalled. “The love of God and the fear of him surrounded me more and more. And faith grew. And the spirit roused so that in one day I would say as many as a hundred prayers, and at night only slightly less.”

After six years of slavery, a mysterious, supernatural voice spoke to him: “Soon you will return to your homeland.”

So Patrick fled and travelled more than 300 km to a southeastern harbor. There he boarded a ship of traders bound for Europe.

‘We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us.’ I was deeply moved in heart and I could read no further, so I awoke.”

Whether Patrick was the first missionary to Ireland or not, paganism was still dominant when he arrived. “I dwell among gentiles,” he wrote, “in the midst of pagan barbarians, worshipers of idols, and of unclean things.”

Patrick’s mission faced the most opposition from the druids, who practiced magic, were skilled in secular learning (especially law and history), and advised Irish kings. Biographies of the saint are replete with stories of druids who “wished to kill holy Patrick.”

“Daily I expect murder, fraud or captivity,” Patrick wrote, “but I fear none of these things because of the promises of heaven. I have cast myself into the hands of God almighty who rules everywhere.”

Patrick was as fully convinced as the Celts that the power of the druids was real, but he brought news of a stronger power, a power expressed in the prayer known as the Lorica:

*I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through a belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness*

Of the Creator of creation.

*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 sit down,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.*

Despite how the Lord worked through him, Patrick was self-conscious, especially about his educational background. "I still blush and fear more than anything to have my lack of learning brought out into the open," he wrote in his *Confession*. "For I am unable to explain my mind to learned people."

Over and over again, Patrick wrote that he was not worthy to be a bishop. If Patrick was not confident about his own shortcomings, he held a deep sense of God's intimate involvement in his life. "I have known God as my authority, for he knows all things even before they are done," he wrote. "He would frequently forewarn me of many things by his divine response."

O God who chose the Bishop St. Patrick to preach your glory to the peoples of Ireland, grant that through his merits an intercession that those who glory in the name of Christian may never cease to proclaim your wondrous deeds to all.