

Saint Patrick Feastday March 17th

Iconic buildings throughout the world turn green and large festive parades celebrate St Patrick's day. Patrick is identified with Ireland as he is the National Apostle. The day set aside to recognise Patrick becomes a day to acknowledge and celebrate being Irish and being of Irish descent.

We will look at the man behind all these celebrations. The two earliest biographies of Patrick come from the 7th century. Muirchu's *Life of Patrick* and *Bishop Tirechan's Account of St Patrick's Journey* promoted the cult of Patrick. However, a much more personal account of his life comes from his own hand. In his 'Confessions', Patrick outlines his spiritual journey. It was written towards the end of his life and is an outpouring of his soul to God.

We will let Patrick introduce himself. 'I am Parick, a sinner, the most unlearned of men, the lowliest of all the faithful...my father was Calpornius who was a deacon and son of the priest Potitus. He ministered in a suburb of Bannaven Taberniae, where he had a country residence nearby'. We see that Patrick came from a comfortable and religious background, his father being a deacon and his grandfather, a priest. Patrick rebelled against his upbringing. However when he was taken captive to Ireland he found himself isolated and very lonely amongst strangers. In desperation he turned to God. 'More and more my love of God and my reverence for him began to increase'. As his relationship with God deepened, he allowed God to guide his life. 'The power of God directed my way successfully and nothing daunted me until I reached that ship', this became his escape from slavery.

A number of years later Patrick recounts 'I was in Britian with my relatives who...begged me that I should never leave them. It was there one night that I saw the vision of a man named Victor who came... with an unlimited number of letters. He gave me one of them and I read the opening words which were "The voice of the Irish"....they shouted with one voice "We ask you, boy, come once more and walk once more among us". I was cut to the very heart'.

As a result, Patrick returned to Ireland, as tradition has it, in the year 432. He lit the Easter fire on the Hill of Slane which was seen by King Laoghaire's gathering at Tara. The Kings advisers said that the fire was to be put out as otherwise it would never be extinguished.

The people of Ireland welcomed the Christian faith. Patrick saw himself as God's ambassador to those people who were at the end of the earth. He travelled extensively and created Christian communities throughout the country imparting a faith and spirituality that got expression in an 8th century prayer dedicated to him, St Patrick's Breastplate. This prayer shows a Christianity that is vibrant, Trinitarian, Christ-centred, in tune with creation and integral to the everyday life of the people.

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