

IN HONOR OF SAINT PATRICK

Saint Patrick's Day is a bit of a strange holiday. It's the one day a year when we're all supposed to act Irish - wear green, eat corn beef and cabbage, drink pints of Guinness... (Shamrock shakes for the kids, of course)... But why? What are we celebrating? And who in the world was Saint Patrick? Why should he be honored?

Oddly enough, Saint Patrick has never been canonized by the Roman Catholic Church (so technically, he is not a Saint). And ... he wasn't even Irish.

Patrick was born in Roman-ruled Britain around 385 AD. His father was a deacon in the church, and he was taught the Christian faith as a child. However, Patrick was a godless and rebellious teenager. In His Confession, he states that "we [he and many of his people] were quite drawn away from God, we did not keep His precepts, nor were we obedient to our priests who used to remind us of our salvation." (The Confession of St. Patrick, 1).

When Patrick was 16 years old, Irish pirates invaded Britain. They burned his home, killed his family and took him back to Ireland as a slave. Having lost everything, Patrick cried out to God. He recalls: "There the Lord opened my mind to an awareness of my unbelief, in order that, even so late, I might remember my transgressions and turn with all my heart to the Lord my God..." (The Confession, 2)

Patrick experienced for himself the salvation he had previously ignored - that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for his sins and rose again for his redemption. He began to pray fervently all day and night, holding on to the promise "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." (Psalm 50:15)

After six years, Patrick was miraculously able to escape and return to Britain where he devoted himself to the Lord's service. He was convinced that "our way to repay the Lord is to exalt him and confess his wonders before every nation under heaven." (The Confession, 3)

One night, Patrick had a vision of a man named Victoricus delivering a letter to him from the Irish. "They called out as it were with one voice: 'We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us.' And [he] was stung intensely in [his] heart..." (The Confession, 23) Ultimately, in 432 AD, Pope Celestine ordained Patrick and sent him back to Ireland to serve as their new Bishop.

He would spend the rest of his life freely serving the same people who once enslaved him. Through Patrick and many other faithful Christians, the Gospel of Jesus Christ set Ireland free from darkness and despair. Many thousands experienced the forgiveness of sin and new life in Christ... just like Patrick did when he was a slave in this godforsaken land.

Patrick died on March 17, 461 AD and is buried in Saul, Downpatrick in Northern Ireland.

At the end of His Confession, Patrick explains how he was able to return to the land of such pain and misery without a hint of bitterness but with love even for his enemies:

"I testify in truthfulness and gladness of heart before God and his holy angels that I never had any reason, except the Gospel and his promises, ever to have returned to that nation from which I had previously escaped with difficulty." (The Confession, 61)

Saint Patrick's Day is actually a celebration of the arrival of Christianity in Ireland. And, if we really want to honor this man, we would do well to respectfully listen and learn the Gospel of Jesus Christ that Patrick believed and preached. Then, let us repent and be forgiven of our sins, just like Patrick did when he was a slave in Ireland. And further, by the power of God's grace, let us forgive and love even those who have brought us great pain... just like Patrick did for the Irish.