

Monday ~~March 17th~~ was St. Patrick's Day and I was delighted to see the Feast of St. Patrick was properly honored on the Front page of the Times Standard the following morning. *On that same Monday,* ~~Instead of celebrating with shamrocks, corned beef and cabbage,~~ I presided at a funeral of a dear parishioner, who was very proud to be born on St. Patrick's day even though she was not Irish. Yes, her memorial service was held on her birthday, both of which fell on St. Patrick's Day—adding both solemnity and ~~humor~~ ^{levity} to the celebration of her life. After all, there is no humor quite like Irish humor. ~~And there is no Saint quite like Saint Patrick.~~

Legend has ~~greatly~~ embellished St. Patrick's story: but what we do know ~~about his life~~ is this:

~~St.~~ Patrick was born in Roman Britain. Calpornius, his father, was a deacon, his grandfather ~~Patrick~~ a priest. But Patrick was not particularly religious early in life. According to the Confession, his chief work and autobiography, at the age of ~~just~~ sixteen Patrick was captured by a group of Irish pirates. The raiders brought Patrick to Ireland where he was enslaved and held captive for six years. ~~Patrick writes in The Confession, that the~~ time he spent in captivity was critical to his spiritual development. He explains that the Lord had mercy on his youth and ignorance, and afforded him the opportunity to be forgiven of his sins, ~~and converted to Christianity.~~ While in captivity, Saint Patrick worked as a shepherd and strengthened his relationship with God through prayer eventually leading him to convert to Christianity.

After six years of captivity he heard a voice telling him that he would soon go home, and ~~then~~ that his ship was ready. Fleeing his master, he traveled to a port, two hundred miles away, where he found a ship and with difficulty persuaded the captain to take him. After three days sailing they landed, presumably in Britain, and apparently all left the ship, walking for 28 days in a "wilderness", becoming faint from hunger before encountering a herd of wild boar; since this was shortly after Patrick had urged them to put their faith in God, his prestige in the group was greatly increased. After various adventures, he returned home to his family, ~~now~~ in his early twenties. ~~After returning home to Britain, Patrick~~ continued to study Christianity.

Then, a momentous ^{message} moment, Patrick ~~accounts that he~~ had a vision a few years ^{later} after returning home: "I saw a man coming, as it were from Ireland. His name was Victoricus, and he carried many letters, and he gave me one of them. I read the heading: "The Voice of the Irish". As I began the letter, I imagined in that moment that I heard the voice of those very people who were ... beside the western sea—and they cried out, as with one voice: "We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us."

Acting on the vision, Patrick returned to Ireland as a Christian missionary. His life as a missionary was not easy; neither could it have been easy to go across the sea and preach ~~the~~ Good news and forgiveness to people who were his former captors and tormentors. But this Patrick did, preaching to thousands and baptizing many into the Christian faith ~~from their former pagan practices.~~

So while we celebrated St. Patrick's Day with corned beef and cabbage ~~and lots of~~ shamrocks, and maybe a shot of Irish whiskey, we should remember the story of Ireland's patron saint and be ^{inspired} encouraged by the good that can come from forgiving ^{our} enemies and praying for your persecutors.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment