

O God, who chose the Bishop Saint Patrick to preach your glory to the peoples of Ireland, grant, through his merits and intercession that those who glory in the name of Christian may never cease to proclaim your wondrous deeds to all. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

We meet again, at St. Mark's, as I arise from retirement again today, to recall that my Grandma Beatrice Potts Stanley used to tell me that her immigrant Ulster Grandmother Meggie Potts was "as Irish as Patty's Pig!"

Maybe we're not all THAT Irish, maybe we don't all weep on hearing "Danny Boy," but on this Feast of St. Patrick, people ask almost everyone, "Are you wearin' the Green today." On this day very un-Irish people still drink green beer with corned beef and cabbage and soda bread. They join Irish folk, at pubs and parades, in toasting the Emerald Isle, repeating old Irish limericks, mostly forbidden in church and other polite company! Some say that St. Patrick is the favorite saint of people who don't believe in saints. Now let's be honest, the Irish are an odd lot. a proud, pugnacious and resilient people, who don't take easily to being defined, as always lucky or always drunk, or as all Catholic policemen, priests, boxers, bartenders or nannies named Murphy. In spite of their stereotypes, the Irish tend to see humor in almost everything, including themselves. For example, it was said that a German spy was sent to Ireland during World War II is instructed to meet an Irish spy named Murphy and confirm Murphy's identity by saying, "The weather could change by Tuesday." After the German parachutes into Ireland, he sets off for town. Along the way, he asks a farmer where to find a man named Murphy. "Well, sir, it all depends on which Murphy," says the farmer. "We have Murphy the doctor, Murphy the postal carrier, Murphy the stonemason and Murphy the teacher. As a matter of fact, I, too, am Murphy, Murphy the farmer." The German gets an idea. "The weather could change by Tuesday," he says. "Aye," says the farmer, "You'll be wantin' Murphy the spy."

Just as it was hard for the German spy to pick out the right Murphy, historically it is really hard for us to pick out the right St. Patrick. Not many facts are known about the life of St. Patrick. There are many magically delicious legends and fairy tales about the Patron Saint of Ireland that need not be believed! No, Patrick did not drive snakes out of Ireland. Nor did he teach the Trinity to children using shamrocks. St. Patrick's famous

Breastplate was likely written three centuries after his death. Old Patty didn't even invent Guinness! But what we know for sure is that the real St. Patrick and St. Paul went out into the wilds in mission, without leprechauns, fairies or lucky charms, to call us all to the Living Christ. Patrick said, *"I came to the people of Ireland to preach the Gospel (of Christ), and to suffer insult from the unbelievers...and many persecutions...I am prepared to give my life without hesitation and most gladly for his name."* Both Patrick and Paul charged their fellow Christians to "stand firm in the Lord today." Stand firm, not in one's own wisdom and strength, but "in the Lord's." **St. Patrick once said "I am willing to draw closer to God in turbulent times." Are we? "** **Young Patrick once bound in captivity by Irish raiders, for six years, learned to speak Irish from his captors, now bound himself to proclaim the eternal strength of the Holy and Undivided Trinity. Patrick's life-changing revelation was that the same tribal society must be freed of our common human bondage, by the same Lord that freed him. Freed to live holy and peaceful and undivided lives in Christ! How's that for a Lenten discipline? In Patrick's own Confession he writes of his youthful conversion:**

"It was there that the Lord opened up my awareness of my lack of faith. Even though it came about late, I recognised my failings. So I turned with all my heart to the Lord my God and he looked down on my lowliness and had mercy on my youthful ignorance. He guarded me before I knew him, and before I came to wisdom and could distinguish between good and evil. He protected me and consoled me as a father does for his son."

Patrick was totally convinced that his liberation was also theirs, and ours. The wild Irish kings and tribes witnessed their young slave's return, to the very place of his former captivity, to bring them that perfect freedom in the love, forgiveness and redemption that God had given him., the same which Ireland had refused to him in his youth. **God promised Abraham today, "I am your shield and your reward shall be great."** **Against all odds and his family's pleadings, the real St. Patrick who escaped his captors, re-crossed the Irish Sea, around 432 AD, to convert, and bind the Emerald Isle to a strong Trinitarian Faith, as Paul did for the Roman world of his time. In the missionary zeal of a freed and reborn soldier, shielded in Christ, Patrick fearlessly proclaimed the Gospel to the Irish and to the ages. For this mission, Patrick was opposed by the pagan tribal leaders of Ireland severely criticized by the English clergy. Patrick admitted,**

“I am hated” but he refused to give up. Patrick’s mighty spirit, if not his actual words are portrayed in a victory song, in immortal Irish words attributed to him.

I arise today
Through God’s strength to pilot me;
God’s might to uphold me,
God’s wisdom to guide me,
God’s eye to look before me,
God’s ear to hear me,
God’s word to speak for me,
God’s hand to guard me,
God’s way to lie before me,
God’s shield to protect me,
God’s hosts to save me
From snares of the devil,
From temptations of vices,
From everyone who desires me ill,
Afar and anear,
Alone or in a multitude.

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through a belief in the Threeness,
Through a confession of the Oneness
Of the Creator of creation”

As 21st C. Christians, are we willing to stand for a lesser invocation today? In our Gospel Jesus was counseled to run away in fear from Herod. “Jesus, Herod’s gonna snatch your life away, like foxes snatch chickens, if you don’t high tail it outta here,” the Pharisees say. Jesus, said to the Pharisees’ advice, as if He were Irish, saying “No, tell Old Herod that Old Fox, that I am called to heal and teach here in Herod’s Kingdom today, and that I will, for it is God’s Kingdom that I serve and in which I stand.” Jesus’ steadfast and selfless courage is exemplified in Patrick’s Confession, in his own words: *“That is why I cannot be silent – nor would it be good to do so – about such great blessings and such a gift that the Lord so kindly bestowed in the land of my captivity.”* Through facing our outward trials and inward captivity, we become bitter or better. St. Patrick became better. And, church, so must we, for we would be wantin’ Jesus, the Son of God.

Our lives, so freed and risen and changed in Christ, must not be silent or flee from bearing witness to God’s liberating love in our times, and communities. Again and again, when God’s little ones are seduced

and snatched away. Again and again, when people of all faiths are slaughtered in the name of race or religion, we must speak out as fiercely as Patrick did when his Irish converts were ritually sacrificed and slaughtered by their pagan priests and kings. As much as God's mission was binding for Abraham, and Paul and Patrick, it's time for all disciples of God to bind our own hearts in unity and to stand firm, not in enslavement to our divisive politics and tribalism but to stand firm again in our common profession of Christian faith and mission.

St. Mark's will continue to be those who show up in mission, who are globally blessed to be locally called into our broken world. To stand firm in the Strong Name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. In Honduras, in the Food Bank, at the Glebe, in the We Care Prayer warriors and the Youth Center and at Emmanuel Eagle Rock, and in the stewardship of this holy place. All of which are still and must be shielded and sustained, in the Name of the Christ, that Patrick loved and knew.

Dear friends remember, what St. Paul, promised us all, whether Irish or not: "I can do all this through him who gives me strength....Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, **stand firm** in the Lord, in this way." And finally I come again to Fincastle today, to bless all, whom we love and long for in this holy place, with these words:

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind always be at your back.

*May the sun shine warm upon your face,
and rains fall soft upon your fields.*

And until we meet again,

May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

AMEN