

Tuesday, March 17

Scripture Reading: Acts 17:22-31

Today is St. Patrick's Day. In America, it is a day to "be Irish", hold parades, drink green beer, eat corned beef and cabbage and, like myself, have enormous pride in their Irish heritage. Until recently, however, the Irish in Ireland did not celebrate St. Patrick's Day in such fashion. For the Irish, it was a solemn, holy day on the Catholic Church's calendar, celebrated by a special Mass. In 1903, it officially became a bank holiday, and until the 1970s, the pubs were closed on that day in reverence. However, in the mid-1990s, the Irish government and tourism board realized the popularity of the holiday outside of the country and began to promote it as a day of Irish heritage and pride.

Many celebrate St. Patrick's Day, but few realize the importance of the man in Irish history. Many know that he brought Christianity to Ireland, but most don't realize that St. Patrick was not Irish. He was a British Celt, taken to Ireland as slave where he lived for six years before escaping. After seeing a vision from God, he returned to Ireland, converting people to Christianity. He was arrested by the Druids several times, but continued to preach the Gospel throughout the country. In a letter, he wrote "*Thus I am a servant in Christ to a foreign nation for the unspeakable glory of life everlasting which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" The shamrock is a symbol of the day, as it was the tool that Patrick used to explain the Holy Trinity to the Irish, who at the time were deeply embedded in Druid religion.

Patrick died on March 17, 461. In his life, he baptized thousands and established churches and monasteries. He left behind several writings, including a prayer known as *St. Patrick's Breastplate* and the *Confessio* (The Confession of St. Patrick). In the midst of today's celebration of Ireland and the Irish culture, take some time to have a pint of Guinness, remember the man behind the holiday, and pray along with him:

*Christ, protect me today, against every poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against death-wound,
That I may receive abundant reward.
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ within me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ at my right, Christ at my left,
Christ in the fort, Christ in the chariot seat, Christ in the poop [deck],
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks to me,
Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.*

Written by Miranda Bailey