

More than 35,000 pilgrims climb peak in Ireland to honor St. Patrick

DUBLIN, Ireland - More than 35,000 pilgrims climbed to the summit of Croagh Patrick for Reek Sunday, making this year's journey one of the busiest ever.

Normally on the last Sunday of July some 20,000 people make the 2,505-foot climb to the top of the mountain where St. Patrick fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. But more people participated in this year's pilgrimage July 27 because of publicity that the 11 a.m. Mass from the summit would be broadcast live, Irish police said.

The nationally televised Mass was part of the Catholic Church in Ireland's celebration of the "Year of Vocations," which will run until Vocations Sunday, May 2. The vocations of priesthood, religious life, marriage, single life and career choices inside and outside the home will be highlighted and promoted.

"A new generation of priests will spring up when they see the full living of the Christian life in their homes, their schools, in their workplaces and parish communities. Only then will they be prompted to give themselves to radical service of Christian people," said Archbishop Michael Neary of Tuam at the Mass on the mountain in County Mayo.

The last Sunday in July, Reek Sunday, is named after the Irish word for mountain. The first climbers began their ascent at 3:30 a.m.

During the year, more than 100,000 people will make the pilgrimage to the top of the mountain. In fulfilling the conditions of the pilgrimage, which include receiving the sacraments of reconciliation and Communion, pilgrims receive a plenary indulgence.

Obtaining the plenary indulgence is easier on Reek Sunday because a team of priests is available on the summit to hear confessions and to celebrate Mass every half-hour.

Many made the pilgrimage barefoot, although pilgrimage organizers with the

Archdiocese of Tuam recommend people wear appropriate footwear and warm clothing because the mountainside is covered with loose rocks and bad weather can occur at any time of the year.

Although this year's pilgrimage mostly had good weather, the Knights of Malta, the world's oldest chivalric order, said its 150 pilgrims dealt with 22 minor injuries and with four major injuries involving fractures that required helicopter evacuations.