

# Paralysis won't stop priest at Fells Point St. Patrick's Day Mass

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Growing up in New York, Redemptorist Father John Murray loved marching with his father in the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade. Now that he uses a wheelchair, Father Murray is about to promote the Saint of Ireland in a way that may prove more powerful than anything he could have done on foot in a parade.

Nearly seven months after a freak accident left him paralyzed from the chest down, Father Murray will be the homilist at the 10 a.m. March 17 St. Patrick's Day Mass at St. Patrick in Fells Point. It will mark a milestone in Father Murray's recovery - only the second time he has preached outside his residence at Stella Maris in Timonium since an Aug. 27 accident.

"It's thrilling to be able to preach again," said Father Murray, who gave the March 6 homily at St. John Neumann in Annapolis.

The last several months have been difficult for the former pastor of St. Wenceslaus in Baltimore and St. Mary in Annapolis.

During a morning stroll on the boardwalk in Long Beach, N.J., Father Murray fell and hit his head on a railing - leaving him paralyzed from the chest down. He was rushed to the Jersey Shore Medical Center, where he had emergency spinal cord surgery. After undergoing rehabilitation at the Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation in West Orange, the paraplegic moved to Stella Maris Nov. 3.

"My wheelchair is my cross," Father Murray said. "Paralysis is certainly a major cross, but it also reveals true character."

The priest said he has learned the importance of God's grace in bearing his cross - not alone, he said, but with Christ's help.

Although doctors in New Jersey told him there was little chance he would ever move his legs again, Father Murray said his condition is improving, thanks to 10-15 hours of weekly therapy at Stella Maris.

Father Murray called it a blessing to live with fellow Redemptorists at Stella Maris, most of whom are elderly or infirm.

“An important hallmark of the Redemptorists is community life,” he said. “I certainly sense that here at Stella Maris, and I am so grateful for my Redemptorist vocation.”

A noted writer in the Catholic press and a former columnist for The Catholic Review, Father Murray often gave missions throughout the archdiocese and across the East Coast. Ironically, his injury may have opened up an even larger international audience as he has begun preaching once or twice a month on his religious community’s website, [www.redemptorists.net](http://www.redemptorists.net).

For his St. Patrick’s Day homily, Father Murray intends to discuss the lessons that can be learned from the saint’s life. St. Patrick had a great interest in the Trinity, unity in the church and family, Father Murray said.

“He taught the Irish people how to evangelize the world,” Father Murray said.

That’s exactly what the priest is doing.