

# St. Patrick's Day Homily

## Introduction

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to offer Mass for the first time in this historic Church, dedicated to St. Patrick. Here, various bishops were ordained and sent forth as missionaries. I think in particular of Bishop Benedict Joseph Flaget, who was consecrated by Archbishop Carroll in 1810 and sent to Bardstown, Kentucky, to found a new and sprawling diocese.

And how appropriate that we gather to celebrate here the missionary work of our Patron, St. Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland. And if, perhaps, the weather is not entirely to our liking, even that should remind us of the hardships which St. Patrick endured in order that he might bring the faith to Emerald Isle. When we think of St. Patrick's holiness and courage, Irish eyes should smile no matter what the weather may bring.

## Cliffs Notes on St. Patrick

Although we celebrate St. Patrick's Day each year, we need to be reminded of the essential facts of his life, as best they can be determined in the mist of history. What we know is that he was born in Great Britain in waning years of the 4th century. At the age of 16, he was captured by Irish pirates and was kept in captivity for 6 years. When he got the chance he fled back to his homeland where his faith in Christ and the Church came alive. In a vision he was told to return to Ireland, the place of his captivity, not to seek revenge but to bring the Christian faith. And thus began the life's work of the Apostle of Ireland.

Patrick could not have found it easy to return to the place of his captivity. We should also remember that he was in constant danger as he went about his mission of preaching the Christian faith. He endured all kinds of hardships, reminiscent of those that St. Paul endured. Yet with the grace that comes from God St. Patrick resourcefully introduced the Christian faith in pagan territory and in the process captured the imagination and the affections of the Irish people.

To this day, anyone who teaches religion knows how Patrick used the shamrock to present the Trinity to his audiences. It is said that he banished snakes from Ireland

and while that is likely the stuff of legends, there is no doubt he did much to banish the Father of Lies from the Emerald Isle.

### **Faith and Culture**

The culture of faith for which St. Patrick laid the foundation has served us well. He, and those who came after him, planted the faith deep in the soil of Ireland. The seeds of faith he planted produced more than a hundred-fold as the faith took root in countless Irish families, producing martyrs, saints, an abundance of vocations, and missionaries. Many of them found their way to the United States and contributed mightily – not only to building railroads and industries in this country – but also to building up the Church in our nation. We continue to stand on the shoulders of those Irish immigrants.

But now, the Church in Ireland & the United States must confront a new situation. First, as we see right here at St. Patrick's and in nearby Sacred Heart in Highlandtown, there are new waves of immigrants coming to our nation, including Latino Catholics, whose presence here will shape the life of the Church for years to come. Second, however, we are also coming to understand that people don't remain as active Catholics simply by being part of a culture, or by "cultural osmosis" as one author put it; cultural Catholics are drifting away. Rather, in our increasingly secular culture, we must again be more like St. Patrick. We must be mission-driven, dedicated to evangelizing even our own members, so that we will be not merely cultural Catholics but intentional Catholics, men and women who have embraced the faith in its fullness and are willing to bear witness to it in a culture that seemingly leaves less room for God and the things of God.

### **Missionary Impulse**

For over forty years, successive Popes have urged us to embrace evangelization as the primary identity and mission of the Church. And now, with Pope Francis on the world scene, that call has come to us in with new vigor. Like St. Patrick he has a knack for explaining the faith with images that we can all understand and by setting an example that resonates in our hearts. Pope Francis is calling all of us, in our various vocations, first and foremost to return to the heart of our faith – to open our hearts to Christ and his compassionate love, to believe that he loves us, that he died to save us, and that he walks by our side in our daily lives.

Once that message hits home, again and again, then we will consciously rededicate ourselves to the Catholic faith, by a life of daily prayer, by reading Scripture and sharing in the Mass & sacraments, and by respecting the poor and oppressed, even as we reach out in generous service. And while Pope Francis won a new hearing for the Gospel, his efforts alone will not rebuild the Church. He is counting on us to join him in bearing witness to Christ and in bringing the Gospel, as he often says, “to the margins” – to non-believers, to those who no longer practice their faith, to those young people who feel little or no attachment to God or to the Church, and to the poor, the oppressed, and the sick.

### **225 and Counting**

As the Archdiocese of Baltimore enters upon its 225th year, we will celebrate a wonderful Catholic heritage that goes back to the earliest days of this republic. Among other things, we will celebrate how the sons and daughters of Ireland came to these shores to build a nation and to strengthen the Church. But we will mainly concentrate on the road ahead, seeking to be united by the Holy Spirit in the work of evangelization, the very work to which St. Patrick dedicated his life and ministry.

Through his intercession may God’s blessings be upon these efforts, so that they may bear abundant fruit for years to come.

May God bless us and keep us always in His love.