

Wearin' of the Green

I've never been to the Emerald Isle. But throughout my childhood, my mother made sure my siblings and I knew we were Irish.

She and my father rocked their babies to sleep singing "Toora Looora Looora." Irish music filled our home for the entire month of March, as we sang along to records full of our favorites, including "Who Threw the Overalls in Mrs. Murphy's Chowder?" and "Molly Malone."

My 100 percent Irish-American mother never asked her daughters whether they wanted to learn Irish step dancing. If you turned 5 and could tell your right foot from your left, you were ready to dance. And so we danced, twirling and bouncing through "The Sweets of May," "The Haymakers," and jigs and reels galore.

But the biggest day of the year was always the St. Patrick's Parade. We would squeeze layers of clothing under our Irish dancing costumes and drive downtown to march through cold, windy streets. My father, the only member of the family without a drop of Irish heritage, wore his Kelly green blazer and jumped into whichever friendly group of Irishmen came marching by.

At some point my father became the person who distributed the programs before the parade. He would lead the parade driving his green station wagon, always with a stuffed Kermit the Frog clinging to the roof, and we would run between the crowds and the back of the car, handing out the programs.

Celebrating St. Patrick's Day felt almost as important as Christmas, and being Irish was truly a point of pride. We flew our Irish flag and dressed in green and danced for our classmates at school year after year.

Somewhere along the way we also learned about St. Patrick himself and how he taught people about the Holy Trinity. Understanding three persons in one God might be challenging, but it made perfect sense with the shamrock.

Every year as St. Patrick's Day approaches, I find myself getting excited all over again for the festivities. I love how tangible and colorful the celebrations are, and how the food and music and fanfare bring a little piece of our Irish heritage to life. Symbols and sounds and festivities are so important in helping us make the intangible more meaningful - and we see that as we go to Mass, too.

This time of year is just so rich to experience in our church. We find such a deep, compelling beauty within the liturgical seasons of our Catholic faith - through Lent and into Easter. The ashes, incense, palms, purple, candles, music, Stations of the Cross - along with the prayer and fasting and abstinence - all lead to the poignant beauty of the sacred triduum and the magnificent glory, light and trumpets of Easter.

There's something wonderful about encountering that same experience year after year. It beckons us to draw closer to Jesus, not really to take pride in being Catholic, but more to want to immerse ourselves fully in the experience and to invite others to join us in growing closer to our Lord.

Everyone is Irish on St. Patrick's Day, the saying goes. And Jesus didn't live and die just for me or for you. He died for each of us. So there should be an energy and excitement to sharing that news, just as there is for people who dye their dogs green and march down Charles Street and across a frigid Pratt Street to share their enthusiasm for St. Patrick's Day.

Every year as St. Patrick's Day approaches, I think of how my parents' house is always covered with shamrock decorations, how the music fills each room, and how

the kitchen smells of Irish soda bread.

My children don't seem to be fans of soda bread or the Irish music I remember from my childhood. But they've marched in the St. Patrick's Day Parade. They'll wear green on the big day. And they certainly know "Toora Loora Loora." I sang it to them when they were little, just as my parents sang it to me. It's an Irish lullaby.