

17 March: St Patrick

Patrick, called the Apostle of Ireland, was born in Great Britain. The name of his father was Calphurnius, and that of his mother Conchessa. She is said to have been a relation of St Martin, Bishop of Tours. When Patrick was a lad, he was several times taken prisoner by savages, and while being in their hands he was employed as a shepherd, he already showed marks of his saintliness to come. His spirit was filled with faith, and love, and fear of God, so that he would rise before the light, in snow, and frost, and rain, to make his prayers to God, being accustomed to address God in prayer an hundred times every day, and an hundred times every night. After being rescued from his third captivity, he was placed among the clergy, and for a long time exercised himself in sacred learning. To this end he travelled with much labour, through Gaul, Italy, and the islands of the Tyrrhenian Sea, but at last being called of God to work for the salvation of the Irish, and, having received from the Blessed Pope Celestine a commission to preach the gospel, and likewise being consecrated a Bishop, he betook himself to Ireland.

In the discharge of his calling it is a marvel with how many evils, with how many sufferings and labours, and with how many adversaries the Apostolic Patrick had to bear. Nevertheless, by the goodness of God, that island, which had up to that time been given over to the serving of idols, was, through the preaching of Patrick, so wrought on that she soon brought forth the fruit which won her the name of the Island of Saints. Patrick caused many of her people to be born again by the washing of regeneration; he ordained many Bishops and clerks; he decreed rules for virgins and widows living in continency. By the authority of the Bishop of Rome he established the See of Armagh as the Primatial See of all Ireland, and enriched the Church with relics of the Saints brought from Rome. Patrick, moreover, was so eminently adorned with heavenly visions, with the gift of prophecy, and with great signs and wonders from God, that the fame of him spread itself abroad more and more, day by day.

Besides that which came upon him daily, the care of all the Churches of Ireland, he never suffered his spirit to weary in constant prayer. They say that it was his custom to repeat every day the whole Book of Psalms, together with Songs and Hymns, and two hundred Prayers; that he bent his knees to God in worship three hundred times every day, and that he made on himself the sign of the Cross an hundred times at each of the Seven Hours of the Church Service. He divided the night into three portions; during the first he repeated the first hundred Psalms, and bent his knees two hundred times; during the second he remained plunged in cold water, with heart, eyes, and hands lifted up to heaven, and in that state repeated the remaining fifty Psalms; during the third he took his short rest, lying upon a bare stone. He was a great practiser of lowliness, and, after the pattern of the Apostle, he always continued to work with his own hands. At last he fell asleep in the Lord in extreme old age, refreshed with the Divine Mysteries, worn out with unceasing care for the Churches, and glorious both in word and work. His body is buried in Down in Ulster. He passed away in the fifth century after the giving of salvation by Christ.