

ST PATRICK, EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES AND ENLIGHTENER OF THE IRISH

In the Byzantine Tradition any saint who brings the Christian faith to a new place is honored with the titles “Equal to the Apostles” and “Enlightener.” Such a saint was Patrick (died 493).

Patricius (the Latin name means “nobleman”) was born in what is now the borderlands between England and Scotland, to a Celtic family that had adopted a degree of Roman culture. His father, Calpurnius, was a deacon; his grandfather Potitus was a priest. Patrick’s autobiographical Confession, admits that the saint himself was a spoiled and not particularly religious boy.

At the age of 16, he was captured by Irish pirates and brought to Ireland, where he was forced to herd sheep for a local ruler on the hill of Slemish in County Antrim. In this time, he learned the Irish culture and language and began to pray seriously for the first time in his young life. After six years, he managed to escape and sail home. Like the prodigal son, he was changed by his exile. He entered religious life, was ordained a priest, and apparently spent some time in Gaul (France). He recounts in his Confession how he had a dream in which he saw a letter labeled “The voice of the Irish” and then heard the voices of countless Irish people standing where he had once been a captive shepherd, saying “We ask you, boy, come and walk among us once more.” Patrick resolved to return to Ireland as a missionary of the Gospel and was ordained a bishop for this mission by Pope Celestine in 432.

Although there had been a few priests in Ireland prior to Patrick, the rapid spread of Christian faith on the island is credited to him. Under Patrick’s direction bishops and hundreds of priests were ordained for service in Ireland and the first monastic communities for men and women were established. While his ministry took him around Ireland, Ard Macha (Armagh) became his episcopal see and eventually the place of his burial. The head of the Catholic Church in Ireland is still the Archbishop of Armagh, successor to St Patrick. Patrick’s grave was

desecrated by the Puritans under Cromwell and his relics have all but vanished.

Patrick bravely confronted the pagan rulers around Ireland and frequently clashed with the druids, whose role as religious wise men was seriously threatened by Patrick’s preaching. On one occasion, Patrick risked execution by kindling the traditional Latin Easter fire in defiance of the orders of the High King Laoghaire. Another confrontation between King Laoghaire and St Patrick has led to an interesting custom. Laoghaire once invited St Patrick to a royal feast during the season of Lent, knowing full well that Patrick was strictly abstaining from meat. Presented with roast pork, legend has it that Patrick blessed the meat and changed it miraculously into fish, which he was permitted to eat according to the Latin fasting customs of the time. Since the 11th century, on the basis of “St Patrick’s Fish,” the Irish have claimed a dispensation from abstinence from meat on St Patrick’s Day, which always falls during Lent.

St Patrick’s symbol is the seamrog (or shamrock, the Irish word for clover). According to legend, St Patrick once picked a clover from the field as he was attempted to explain to his pagan audience the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The three leaves joined to make one plant proved to be a convincing illustration of the three Persons in one God. The shamrocks used as decorations on St Patrick’s Day are therefore Christian symbols expressing orthodox Christian faith.

Saints are remembered on the day of their death, or more precisely, the day of their birth into eternal life. St Patrick’s Day, the day of his passage to eternal life, is March 17 on the calendar of the Roman Church. Patrick was unknown in the East but, since his ministry preceded the separation of the Eastern and Western Churches, he is also honored by Orthodox Christians.

ST PATRICK, EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES AND ENLIGHTENER OF THE IRISH

In the Byzantine Tradition any saint who brings the Christian faith to a new place is honored with the titles “Equal to the Apostles” and “Enlightener.” Such a saint was Patrick (died 493).

Patricius (the Latin name means “nobleman”) was born in what is now the borderland between England and Scotland, to a Celtic family that had adopted a degree of Roman culture. His father, Calpurnius, was a deacon; his grandfather Potitus was a priest. Patrick’s autobiographical Confession admits that the saint himself was a spoiled and not particularly religious boy.

At the age of 16, he was captured by Irish pirates and brought to Ireland, where he was forced to herd sheep for a local ruler on the hill of Slemish in County Antrim. In this time, he learned the Irish culture and language and began to pray seriously for the first time in his young life. After six years, he managed to escape and sail home. Like the prodigal son, he was changed by his exile. He entered religious life, was ordained a priest, and apparently spent some time in Gaul (France). He recounts in his Confession how he had a dream in which he saw a letter labeled “The voice of the Irish” and then heard the voices of countless Irish people standing where he had once been a captive shepherd, saying “We ask you, boy, come and walk among us once more.” Patrick resolved to return to Ireland as a missionary of the Gospel and was ordained a bishop for this mission by Pope Celestine in 432.

Although there had been a few priests in Ireland prior to Patrick, the rapid spread of Christian faith on the island is credited to him. Under Patrick’s direction bishops and hundreds of priests were ordained for service in Ireland and the first monastic communities for men and women were established. While his ministry took him around Ireland, Ard Macha (Armagh) became his episcopal see and eventually the place of his burial. The head of the Catholic Church in Ireland is still the Archbishop of Armagh, successor to St Patrick. Patrick’s grave was

desecrated by the Puritans under Cromwell and his relics have all but vanished.

Patrick bravely confronted the pagan rulers around Ireland and frequently clashed with the druids, whose role as religious wise men was seriously threatened by Patrick’s preaching. On one occasion, Patrick risked execution by kindling the traditional Latin Easter fire in defiance of the orders of the High King Laoghaire. Another confrontation between King Laoghaire and St Patrick has led to an interesting custom. Laoghaire once invited St Patrick to a royal feast during the season of Lent, knowing full well that Patrick was strictly abstaining from meat. Presented with roast pork, legend has it that Patrick blessed the meat and changed it miraculously into fish, which he was permitted to eat according to the Latin fasting customs of the time. Since the 11th century, on the basis of “St Patrick’s Fish,” the Irish have claimed a dispensation from abstinence from meat on St Patrick’s Day, which always falls during Lent.

St Patrick’s symbol is the seamrog (or shamrock, the Irish word for clover). According to legend, St Patrick once picked a clover from the field as he was attempted to explain to his pagan audience the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The three leaves joined to make one plant proved to be a convincing illustration of the three Persons in one God. The shamrocks used as decorations on St Patrick’s Day are therefore Christian symbols expressing orthodox Christian faith.

Saints are remembered on the day of their death, or more precisely, the day of their birth into eternal life. St Patrick’s Day, the day of his passage to eternal life, is March 17 on the calendar of the Roman Church. Patrick was unknown in the East but, since his ministry preceded the separation of the Eastern and Western Churches, he is also honored by Orthodox Christians.

ST PATRICK'S BREASTPLATE

This poetic prayer is called a "breastplate" because of its theme of protection.

I arise today through a mighty strength:
the invocation of the Trinity.
Through belief in the threeness, through confession of the oneness
Of the Creator of creation.

I arise today through the strength of Christ's birth with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension,
Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of Doom.

I arise today through the strength of the Cherubim's love,
In angels' obedience, in archangels' service,
In hope of resurrection to meet with reward,
In patriarchs' prayers, in prophets' predictions,
In apostles' preaching, in confessors' creeds,
In virgins' innocence, in deeds of righteous men.

I arise today through heaven's strength:
Light of sun, radiance of moon,
Splendor of fire, speed of lightning,
Swiftiness of wind, depth of sea,
Firmness of earth, hardness of rock.

I arise today through God's strength to steer me,
God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look out for me, God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me, from snares of devils
From temptation of vices, from everyone who shall wish me ill,
Afar and anear, alone and in a multitude. . .

Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above e,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I rise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every one who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today through a mighty strength:
the invocation of the Trinity.
Through belief in the threeness, through confession of the oneness
Of the Creator of creation.

ST PATRICK'S BREASTPLATE

This poetic prayer is called a "breastplate" because of its theme of protection.

I arise today through a mighty strength:
the invocation of the Trinity.
Through belief in the threeness, through confession of the oneness
Of the Creator of creation.

I arise today through the strength of Christ's birth with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension,
Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of Doom.

I arise today through the strength of the Cherubim's love,
In angels' obedience, in archangels' service,
In hope of resurrection to meet with reward,
In patriarchs' prayers, in prophets' predictions,
In apostles' preaching, in confessors' creeds,
In virgins' innocence, in deeds of righteous men.

I arise today through heaven's strength:
Light of sun, radiance of moon,
Splendor of fire, speed of lightning,
Swiftiness of wind, depth of sea,
Firmness of earth, hardness of rock.

I arise today through God's strength to steer me,
God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look out for me, God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me, from snares of devils
From temptation of vices, from everyone who shall wish me ill,
Afar and anear, alone and in a multitude. . .

Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above e,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I rise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every one who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today through a mighty strength:
the invocation of the Trinity.
Through belief in the threeness, through confession of the oneness
Of the Creator of creation.