

St. Patrick  
Wednesday in Laetare, the 25th Day of Lent  
March 17, 2010

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University Lutheran Chapel  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

✠ Jesu juva ✠

ET IN SPIRITUM SANCTUM – GIVING FAITH AND LOVE

I Corinthians 1:18-25; Matthew 5:43-48

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

**T**oday is, of course, St. Patrick's Day. While much of our country will be celebrating the day by dressing in Kelly green, sporting shamrocks, and drinking green beer, most of them have no idea who St. Patrick really was or what he really did. Many might be able to tell you that he is the patron saint of Ireland, but most will have no idea why he is Ireland's favorite saint. But we should learn his story, for quite a story it is, a story of hardship, of daring, of love, of bravery and of faithfulness.

Patrick, you see, was not a native of Ireland. He was captured from his homeland in England at the age of sixteen and brought to Ireland as a slave. Though he had been a child of a deacon and grandson of a priest, Patrick says that until he was enslaved he did not know the true God. What he means is that prior to his suffering as a slave he did not really live in faith. The Holy Spirit, through suffering, produced in him a zeal for God and His grace that he did not have before. And so for six years Patrick lived as a slave tending sheep in Ireland, all the while diligent in prayer and in meditation on the Word of God he had heard as a child. Until one day he fled from his enslavement and boarded a ship headed for Gaul. Eventually Patrick arrived back in his homeland of England again, and was in his own words: "receive... as their son".

But Ireland was calling him back. The land was mainly pagan, still under the influence of the druids (though there were some small scattered Christian communities). One would think that Patrick, who had suffered so under the pagans, would never wish to return to Ireland; but he felt pity for those who had been his enemies and did not want to see them consigned to the fires of Hell. And so, after studying in Gaul and becoming a priest, he was eventually sent to Ireland to be bishop there and to work at converting the pagans.

By his diligence and faithfulness, the Spirit of God working through the preaching of the Gospel, Ireland became a Christian land. But one must ask, by what power does a man return to his captors and bring them the Gospel? By love? Yes. Here we see an



example of the kind of love and faith spoken of by our Lord in today's Gospel lesson: "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven..."

But from where does such love come? Such love comes only as a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a fruit of the Gospel and of the Spirit's work in a person who has believed that Gospel. Of his entire career among them, Patrick wrote: "I never had any reason except the Gospel and its promises why I should ever return to the people from whom once before I barely escaped," and a little later, that whatever he accomplished "it was the gift of God."

Only the power of God, the calling and enlightening of the Holy Spirit, can convert a single person to faith in Christ, let alone a whole nation. As we heard from St. Paul tonight, the cross of our Lord seems foolish to those who are perishing, but is truly the power of God. And by the preaching of the message, by the delivery of the Word of Christ, God saves those who believe. The Holy Spirit is the one who opens the heart and the mind to Christ, through the Word of Christ. He is the one who reveals God to us and draws us to God.

Who could believe what God says of Himself if the Holy Spirit were not enlightening them so that they may. The Holy Trinity is a mystery beyond examination and reason. And whatever you use to try to explain God's nature, whether it be the sun and its rays, or the shamrock, or what have you, the explanations fall far short of the glory that is the Trinity and the nature of God. Only by the Spirit's power to come to know this mystery. Only by the Spirit's gift do we come to confess God as we do in the Creed.

Now in the third article of the Creed we confess the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. We also confess that the Spirit works through the means of grace, that is through the writings of the prophets and through the sacraments (hence we go on to confess the church as the communion of saints who have been baptized.) Here we find God's autobiography, as it were. By Word and through Sacrament we come to know Him as He is. But more than that, we come to know His love for us.

If we think Patrick's love of the Irish to be extraordinary, think on Christ's love for us, and see how much greater His love and sacrifice is, who came down to His own and was not received by them; who loves those who have despised Him; who dies to gain forgiveness and life for those who by their sins have laid stripes and pain upon Him; who rises and proclaims grace and mercy to those who killed Him, and now to us for whose sins also He bled. Here is true love. Here is the Holy Trinity in action.

And by His gift we are given the blessing of faith and of salvation. And we too are given to love that we, like Patrick, may serve those who despise us, may confess Christ to a world that hates Him and doesn't like us much either. But to do this, to live in faith and in love, we must first find our rest and our strength in

His Word and Spirit. In the Words of the Hymn, we are to bind unto ourselves the strong name of the Trinity and His power. Only then we will we be able to confess as Patrick did, that by God's gift, through the Spirit's power, we too were able to both believe and to love. Now to Christ our Lord be all glory and honor, now and forever for His faithfulness and love toward us. Amen.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠