

Stewardship Saint for March: Saint Patrick

ICSC | FEBRUARY 27, 2023



Saint Patrick, the “apostle to Ireland,” is one of the world’s most famous and celebrated saints. His missionary zeal arguably matched that of Saint Paul, whose missionary activities, though oftentimes a severe struggle, remained in the territories governed by Roman law. Saint Patrick, however, was the first recorded Christian missionary to evangelize beyond the bounds of Roman rule and into the darkness of what was then considered the end of the earth.

“Patricius” was born in Roman Britain around 385. His father was a public official and church deacon. He was kidnapped by Irish slave traders while in his mid-teens and forced into slavery; herding sheep on remote Irish hillsides under harsh conditions. Spending most of his time in solitude, he grew to trust in God and embrace a life of prayer. After six years, he made a dangerous and harrowing escape over land and sea that finally resulted in a return to his parents. They found him, at age 22, a serious visionary who sought holiness and friendship with Christ.

Patrick entered the priesthood, and in time, was sent to evangelize the Irish. He was appointed the bishop of Ireland in 435 and established his see at Armagh in the north.

The Irish were known to be wild, unrestrained and corrupt. But Patrick's success in making converts to Christianity was nothing less than astonishing, even to him. He traveled to most parts of Ireland, winning the hearts of the Celtic people by his deep faith, humility, simplicity and pastoral care. He took great measures to incorporate pagan rituals into his teachings on Christianity. Since the ancient Celts honored their gods with fire, Patrick used bonfires to celebrate Easter; and he placed the sun, a powerful Celtic symbol, around the Christian cross to create the now familiar Celtic cross.

Patrick's profound witness to the Gospel eventually brought an end to human sacrifices, trafficking of women, and slavery in general. He is the first person in recorded history to publicly oppose slavery; a protest that would not be taken up again for another millennium.

His writings reveal a keen understanding of stewardship as well. He wrote that whatever good he had been able to accomplish on behalf of the Lord, in his "meager, unlearned, and sinful state ... has been a gift from God."

Over the centuries, Irish immigrants would spread their devotion to Saint Patrick as they established the Catholic faith around the world. He is thought to have died on March 17, 461, the date which became his feast day.