

lest his newly converted children backslide. "May God never permit it to happen to me that I should lose His people which He purchased in the utmost part of the world. . . ! pray to God to give me perseverance that I be a faithful witness to the end of my life!"

In fact, his heart so overflowed with love and concern for them that he even identified himself with his former captors and wrote of "we Irish"! No longer were the Irish the foreign devils who once raided his home and took him away captive - now they were his own people, to whom he had bound himself in love.

At last, the end came. Exhausted by his journeys, worn out by so much care and apostolic labor, in about 451 A.D. at the age of about 75, the spiritual father of Christian Ireland rested from his work, and prepared himself to meet his Lord, the High King of Heaven. Having received Holy Communion, he rested his eyes on the Cross for the last time and gave his soul to God.

St. Patrick, Enlightener of Ireland, was but one of a long line of Orthodox evangelists. Many had come before him; many would come after him: the Greeks Cyril and Methodius, who evangelized the northern Slavs; the Slavic Stephen of Perm, who evangelized the Asian Zyrians; the Russian Innocent, who evangelized the Native Americans. As the Church would spread north and east, so also, through Patrick, it traveled to the extreme western reaches of the Roman world.

Yet for all his greatness, Patrick remained a humble man, like all true evangelists, ascribing all glory to his Lord. "I, Patrick, a sinner, am the most ignorant and of least account among the faithful," he wrote. "I owe it to God's grace that so many people should be born again through me to God."

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the breastplate of SAINT PATRICK

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.

CHRIST WITH ME, CHRIST BEFORE ME,
CHRIST BEHIND ME, CHRIST IN ME,
CHRIST BENEATH ME,
CHRIST ABOVE ME,
CHRIST ON MY RIGHT,
CHRIST ON MY LEFT,
CHRIST IN BREADTH, CHRIST IN LENGTH,
CHRIST IN HEIGHT, CHRIST IN THE HEART
OF EVERY MAN WHO THINKS OF ME,
CHRIST IN THE MOUTH OF
EVERY MAN WHO SPEAKS OF ME,
CHRIST IN EVERY EYE THAT SEES ME,
CHRIST IN EVERY EAR THAT HEARS ME.



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His world fell apart when he was sixteen years old: his home and village were brutally invaded and, with a thousand others of his countrymen, he was beaten and kidnapped, taken scratched, bleeding, and bound, to serve as a slave far away from his home.

Yet now this same man is honored, revered, loved, and supplicated by the entire Christian world, and joyful parades are held in his honor, even by those who do not share his faith.

His name is Magonas Sucatus Patricius; the world knows him as St. Patrick, Enlightener of Ireland. In his day, all Ireland knew him as herald and bringer of the new religion, the Faith of the Christians. Some loved him passionately as their spiritual father and as God's Apostle; many more hated and feared him as destroyer of the old gods and old privileged ways. But all respected him as an indomitable, resolute spirit, a steadfast man.

Though we associate him with Ireland, St. Patrick was not Irish by birth, but Roman, a native of Roman Britain. He was the son of the deacon Calpurnius and grandson of the priest Potitus. He lived in southern Britain in the perilous days when the Roman legions had gone home, leaving the resident civilians exposed and defenseless against the pagan barbarians. So it was that the young Patrick was taken from his home

by Irish pirates in a coastal raid in the early 400s. For the next six years, he served his new master, a Druidic chieftain of Dalaradia by the name of Miliucc. His task was to be swineherd.

Though from a clergy family, he was not particularly pious. As he himself recounts, while just a boy, he had a great moral fall "in one day, no, in one hour, because I was not yet strong. I don't know if I was then fifteen years old and I did not believe in the living God but lived in death and unbelief." Yet there, in the deep shadows of the Irish mountains, he slowly came again to faith and recovered a sense of fervent dedication to the Son of God. Having lost all happiness and security in this world, he turned the thoughts of his heart to the world to come.

"Many times a day I prayed," he said. "The love of God and His fear came to me more and more and my faith was strengthened." As with many new converts, zeal burned within him: "My spirit was moved so that in a single day I would say as many as a hundred prayers and almost as many in the night. I used to get up for prayer before daylight, through snow, through frost, through rain, because the spirit within me was fervent."

He also had a young man's sense of adventure and felt God calling him to flee his servitude and return home. One night, he heard an insistent voice say, "See, your ship is ready!" Believing this to be a summons from God, he took flight (even though he risked death by doing so). The ship, however, waited far away - almost two hundred miles distant. He knew no one in the port town and had no idea how he would travel. But he trusted God.

Patrick found a ship setting sail for Gaul (now France) and the captain eventually allowed him to work for his passage. At length he came to Gaul and then to the famous monastery at L'rins. Having learned the ascetic traditions of the monastic fathers, he finally returned home, to Britain.

He might have settled down then, to marry, raise a family, and get on with his life - and vanish from the stage of history. But his Lord had other plans. The young man, now tempered by suffering, was to take his place with other Orthodox evangelists down through the ages.

Patrick began to be restless. Voices came to trouble his dreams - Irish voices calling him back: "We pray you, holy youth, come to us and walk among us once more!" There was nothing for it - Patrick obeyed the heavenly call and returned for a time to the continent to prepare himself for his mission.

When he returned to Ireland, he might not have been

greatly educated as the world knows education (he smarted under a sense of inferiority and referred to himself time and again as "most unlearned," "ignorant," "rustic") but he was wise in God and burning with zeal to win his former captors for Christ. As he said himself, "I was freeborn according to the flesh, but I sold my noble rank for the good of others. Thus I am a servant of Christ to a foreign nation for the unspeakable glory of eternal life which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

So the evangelist began a tireless trek through Ireland which would last several decades, crossing and recrossing the broad land, returning to revisit his new converts and their clergy and to strengthen them in the Orthodox Faith.

He had a retinue of several dozen, which comprised a small monastic community, including his bodyguard, charioteer, psalmist, cook, several artisans, a cowherd, and fellow clergy as well as the youngsters he was training. They traveled slowly, by ox-cart, by chariot, and on foot, over rough tracks, throughout the year and through all weather. His evangelistic strategy was to negotiate with the local chieftain for a grant of land for his church and monastery, and then work to establish and train the clergy to staff it, so that his many converts might have adequate pastoral care.

And many the converts poured in. The missionary bishop, relentless of purpose, preached with sincerity and gentleness to the hearts of the humble folk, and hundreds of thousands responded to his gospel. Patrick himself writes of "spreading our nets so that a great multitude and throng might be caught for God," and of "baptizing many thousands of people."

But the work was never easy. In his continual journeying back and forth across Ireland, endless danger threatened. Once, to cite but one example, he was arrested by a chieftain who felt threatened by the success of the itinerant evangelist. Patrick was put in irons, his companions were bound and all their property seized. Some talked of killing the troublesome bishop. But one of their company had escaped in the confusion, and he went tearing through the forest as fast as he could to find their supporters in a neighboring territory.

After a week or so, he found them. They took arms and quickly came running to confront the saint's captors, who backed down, set everyone free, and restored the church property to them. As Patrick himself later wrote of the incident, "Whatever was ours was restored to us because of God and our dear friends whom we had met before."

Such adventures abounded. Other tales tell how the roving



missionary challenged the High King of Tara by lighting the Holy Fire at Pascha - at the same time as a great pagan feast, when no fire was permitted to be lit before that of the king. Or of how he tumbled the great stone idol Cenn Cruaich to the ground and thereby broke the hold of paganism over the hearts of men.

All of these stories vividly illustrate one of the saint's main characteristics, which won him the respect and admiration of all the Irish: his unflinching courage. Nothing could turn him from his path or persuade him to surrender his holy mission - not threats against his life, nor capture, nor exhausting journeys, nor homesickness for his native land.

And he did miss his home. "How I would have loved," he wrote, "to go to my country and my parents and also to Gaul to visit the brothers and see the faces of the saints of my Lord!" Yet he remained at his post, enduring disappointment, setbacks, and danger "for the sake of the Gospel and its promises." "I live among barbarians," he wrote, "a stranger and exile for the love of God."

Yet, for all his awareness of living in exile far from home, he was kept at his post by one more thing - the love he had for his new Irish people. He referred to them as "sons and daughters," as "the Lord's sheep," as "Christian brothers." He feared to abandon his mission field and return home