

Sermon – Sun, March 17 – St Patrick – at St James, Moncton**Matthew 5:43-48 - Love for Enemies**

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

For by decent I was a freeman, born of a decurion father; yet I have sold this nobility of mine ... I am a slave in Christ to this faraway people for the indescribable glory.” St Patrick

The Love of St Patrick

Happy St Patrick’s Day to you! Or should I say ‘Top of the morning to you.’? Today my talk is about the love of St Patrick’s life! The love of St Patrick’s life was the Irish people...and that is indeed something for the Irish and even the world to celebrate. Any here of Irish descent?

Put on Green hat. Ok, there is a lot of hype around St Patrick’s Day! I find it irresistible. Why? I don’t know. I don’t think I have a drop of Irish blood. But isn’t it a reason to smile amidst so much gloom? I heard that Friday, the leprechauns left a ‘mess’ of gold sprinklings in at least one Kindergarten classroom. We are wished the ‘luck of the Irish’ (who haven’t been lucky at all it seems to me). There is the promise of a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. We have such beautiful music including ‘When Irish Eyes are Smiling’, and of course the green beer!!!

Did you know that there are more people of Irish descent in the USA than people living in Ireland? Did you know that there are giant parades in New York and Boston? 1 million people are expected at this year’s 118th **St. Patrick’s Day Parade** in **Boston**, a beloved city tradition for more than a century. In New York more than 2 million are expected at the parade today. In Chicago, they dump something in to change the river water to Green. Did you know that the Irish were amazed at the great American celebrations for St Patrick’s Day...but they have now begun to celebrate more themselves. There are also parades in Toronto and Ottawa.

There are the many legends about St Patrick. Did he drive out the snakes from Ireland or was it the Druids who had snakes tattooed on their arms who were driven out? Did he use the Shamrock to teach the 3 in 1 God, the Trinity? We don’t know.

What we do know is that he loved his enemy because the Irish people were his enemies. You may already know that Patrick, whose birth name was Gaewyn,

when he was about 16, was kidnapped by Irish raiders. From his home somewhere in Britain, probably Wales, he was taken to Ireland and sold. There, he was put to work as a shepherd of sheep, living rough and isolated. But as the seed must fall into the dark earth and seem to die in order to germinate, so did Patrick's faith come to life during this dark time. He hadn't been a very serious Christian before his abduction, even though his father and grandfather were very committed to the faith. But something awoke in him and he came to know our Lord Christ.

You may know that following a dream telling him he must leave Ireland, Patrick escaped and 200 miles away, found himself a passage to England. He studied to be a priest for 15 years in monasteries in Gaul, France. He was ordained a priest and when the opportunity came, he returned willingly to the Irish, to the people who had treated him so terribly.

He was literally called to them in a dream. He was a man who took his dreams seriously and so he returned to the people who had kidnapped him when he was a youth. He saw beyond them as captors. He wanted to share the love of Christ with them and so he ventured back to old Ireland. He remained there for the rest of his life, about 30 years. He travelled the land. He brought them the story of our Lord Jesus. He wanted them to know of God's fierce love. There had been some before him bearing the story of Christ. But Patrick intensified the spreading of the Word.

The way Patrick did this was borne out of love. It helped that he knew the Irish language from his years there as a shepherd. He also knew about their beliefs and their rituals. Instead of trying to wipe their ways out, he incorporated Christian practices into what already existed. This was wise. We might learn from this and apply it to our situation today; meeting people where they are. Since the sun was an object of worship, Patrick superimposed the symbol of the cross onto the sun, creating what we know as the Celtic cross today...the cross with a circle behind it.

Wells

The mystic fountains of the old religion became the blessed **wells** of the new religion of which **baptism** was the most central rite. These sacred fountains, called after **St. Patrick**, are found all over the country, wherever the Apostle preached, and still are held in the highest regard. Many Christian churches were constructed near pagan wells, and the early Celtic church used them for baptism. A number of

old churches contain a crypt or grotto that opens into a subterranean spring. This place - close to earth and water - is the innermost sanctum, the hidden holy center of the sacred enclosure. Churches were always founded near a well. Pure water was necessary, not only for Baptism and for the Holy Communion, but also for the daily needs of the holy men and women whose lives were given there to the service of God. What wonder these became holy wells - blessed for Baptism, used at mass, giving daily drink to generations of saints, Irish Catholics often make pilgrimages to wells. Here is a bit of a charming essay written by a primary school girl Maureen Berry, who attends Our Lady of Lourdes National School in Bunclody, Co. Wexford.

"We go to holy wells in the summer and in the winter. We go to pray for other people and for ourselves. Holy wells are very special. Some wells are very important to other people, too.

God blesses Holy Wells. Sometimes you can see visions in the well. Lots of people go to visit them a lot of time. We don't have special prayers for each well, we just go to pray if something is gone wrong. And some people go to pray when things go wrong for them.

St. Patrick's struggle with the pagan order of the time began during the Celtic springtime fire festival known as Beltane. The ritual began with the ceremonial lighting of the High King's fire, from which all the other fires in the land were lit. According to legend, St. Patrick lit an Easter fire on a nearby hill. The High King sent nine chariots to subdue Patrick and put out his fire. Circling counter to the sun's path, the chariots attacked, but were unable to prevail against the holy fire.

Patrick travelled around the land for Thirty years until his death on this day, March 17th. Many came to love our Lord, including kings and princes. Many became monks and lived in small communities which became primitive monasteries. During the Dark Ages in Europe...the light of Christ burned bright in Ireland. May God help us to love those who treat us badly and to spread God's love as St Patrick did. Amen.