



Carmelite Spiritual Center

3-00

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Life is Worth Giving

Who is This Man Called Saint Patrick?

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

Few historical figures down through the ages have had to enduring so many myths and legends as St. Patrick of Ireland. So much of his authentic history has been drowned in a sea of time and hyperbole^e that the person has become almost a ~~caricature~~ caricature of himself, And much the same goes for his great spirituality.

And were it not for his two rather brief writings, his "Confessions" and his "Letter to Coroticus", the world would know even less about his authentic self.

He was a man of vision who, although kidnapped by Irish marauders and forced to live as a slave in Ireland for six years, yet believed that God had chosen him to convert the entire island to Christianity. As he relates in his "Confession," Patrick had two great visions which guided his life. The first came to him as a mysterious voice which told him that his years of slavery in Ireland were over, and said, "Look, your ship is ready."

The second vision, after he had returned to Britain, came in a dream. Victorius, a man Patrick knew in Ireland, came to him in the dream with many letters. One, entitled "The Voice of the Irish," he handed to Patrick.

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When he had finished the letter's title, Patrick heard a great many voices crying out: "Holy lad, we beg you to come and walk among us once more." Patrick was so deeply moved that he was unable to continue reading and woke up, convinced more fully that his mission to the Irish would be his great life's work.

But the mission would be a difficult one, even though Patrick had learned the language of the Irish and many of their customs. He would be confronted with a pagan and barbarian people. But by the time he concluded his mission, Patrick was more than pleased that the Irish had given up slave trading, their former human sacrifice was now unthinkable, and even their wars became more confined and limited.

It seems that Patrick's own faith and his experience as a mystic made God seem very real in every aspect of creation. Patrick saw God at work in the world, and he helped the Irish to appreciate the beauty of God's creation. This is still a significant part of Celtic Spirituality to this day. And when Patrick began his missionary work in Ireland, he lived among the Irish as the witness to Christ and His salvation. Patrick felt humbled and honored that he was chosen for this work, and he treated the Irish with respect and understanding. And he died with the hope that his work in Ireland would be permanent and enduring. And so it was.

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What is even more significant, in a way, about Patrick's mission to the Irish is that he is the first missionary to convert ^R people outside the Roman Empire. Even though Christ had commanded his disciples to bring the Gospel to all nations, they just didn't get around to doing that. Perhaps the reason for their reluctance is that those within the Roman Empire were not although ^{er} sure that the barbarians were truly ~~human~~ human. Patrick was convinced they were, and became their pathway to Christ, and changed forever the Christian history of the world.

There is an old legend that persists to this day about Patrick and the Irish. It is said that on Judgment Day, Christ will judge all that nations of the world, but when it comes to the Irish, it will be St. Patrick who will weight them in the balance of life and good deeds. This will certinly be a great blessing for the Irish!

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