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Life is Worth Giving

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST. PATRICK

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

The Celts were originally commemorated in Scripture in St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. They were a Celtic people in Asia Minor (now Turkey), and before the time of St. Paul, the lands of the Celts stretched westward from Galatia to "isle at the end of the world" (Ireland). In the Fourth Century B.C., Roman writers described the Celts as one of the four "peripheral" peoples of the world.

Among the Celts, the Irish seem to have survived with their cultural identity somewhat intact, and their great men and women still remembered for their deeds. Oblivion enshrouded many others, except for St. Patrick.

Few people who have crossed history's pages have left as many "footprints" as did Ireland's St. Patrick. Although much information about Ireland's apostle is available, it is criss-crossed with legend, controversy and speculation.

It is still possible, despite history's disputed facts, to trace the life of St. Patrick by the places which still bear his name, even though some are shrouded in Gaelic.

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The year 390 A.D. is generally reckoned for St. Patrick's birth but the place is uncertain. The Scotch often claim Kilpatrick (cell of Patrick) as his birthplace. According to them he lived at Dal Patrick (district of Patrick) in Lanarkshire and must have visited Craghadraig (rock of Patrick) near Inverness. St. Patrick began his church-building career early as he is credited with the founding of Kirkpatrick (church of Patrick) in Kilcudbright and Kirkpatrick in Dumbries. On leaving Scotland he marked the spot by giving his name to Port Patrick.

After his capture by Irish raiders, St. Patrick lived for six years as a slave in Co. Antrim. After his daring escape he decided to return to convert the Irish. Before this, it seems, he spent time in Wales where we find him wading across the Sarnbadrig (causway of Patrick) that forms a dangerous shoal in Carnarvon Bay. As a farewell gesture he left a "footprint" Llanpadrig (church of Patrick) on the Isle of Anglesea off the coast of Wales.

Patrick was related to Bishop Germanus of Auxerre, so we're not surprised to discover his footprints in France where in Brittany and Normandy we find such places as St. Patrice and St. Patrice au Desert. Statues of St. Patrick were built on pre-historic monuments in the French Department des Cortes-Du-Nord. A local legend still persists about a cave where he hid. A serpent-clearing project by Patrick

has left, according to tradition, the isle of Guernsey free of dangerous snakes. Even the famous St. Patrick's Purgatory on Lough Derg in Ireland has its counterpart in the forest of Longboel near Neuville-Chant-d'Oisel.

On the way to Ireland St. Patrick must have paid a visit to the Isle of Man. Though brief, it was long enough to found another church, Kirk-patrick near Peel. Another remembrance is that the isle itself is called Innis-patrick (island of Patrick).

His first permanent landing on his missionary journey back to Ireland was probably at another Innis-patrick, this one near Dublin. From here St. Patrick's ubiquitous footprints take us helter-skelter through all of Ireland. To Hom-patrick (islet of Patrick) in Co. Dublin, to Co. Down in the North where he converted and baptized the Irish chieftain Dichu in his barn. This event is perpetuated in the Irish town, Saul, or Sabhal-patrick (barn of Patrick). From here we follow the fleet-footed saint to St. Patrick's Wood in Leinster, to Domnach Mor (or Cross-patrick) in Sligo near the River Moy, to Ard-patrick (height of Patrick) in Limerick, to St. Patrick's Rock in Cashel, to Temple-patrick in Antrim and finally to Downpatrick Head in Mayo.

St. Patrick/ Fr. Shanley/ 4

His missionary journeys made St. Patrick very thirsty, as attested to by the scores of wells all over Ireland where he stopped to drink, to baptize his converts, and to leave his name. One can still drink from these wells at Tubber-patrick beside Sligo Bay, and Dunseverick in Co. Antrim, at Finglas in the suburbs of Dublin, or Clonmel or Naas or any of a hundred other places.

To help his preaching take hold St. Patrick constantly founded churches and convents. The abbey of Domnach-padraig (house of Patrick) in Meath near the Boyne River was evidently founded by him. He is also said to have built a church in Dublin where St. Patrick's Cathedral now stands.

But even saints need time for rest and prayer. During the entire Lent of 441, St. Patrick prayed and fasted on a lofty mountain in Mayo above Clew Bay which still bears his name, Croagh-patrick (mountain of Patrick).

When God called the Apostle of the Irish home in 481, the keen of wailing was heard throughout the land. St. Patrick marked his gravesite with the last of his footprints, at Saul near Down-patrick (hill of Patrick). To this day it is a place of pilgrimage for all who honor the Apostle of Ireland.