

Lent 5B and St Patrick 17.3.24

As it's St Patrick's day, I thought that I should find out a little bit about St Patrick.

My first surprise was that he was born in this country (possible quiz question there).

It was in the late fourth century, at the end of the Roman rule and it is not clear of the exact location but we know his father was a senator and tax collector and his grandfather a priest. In his confession he states that he was not an active believer in his youth.

When he was sixteen he was captured from his family's villa, by a group of Irish pirates who took him to Ireland where he was made a slave and held captive for six years. He works as a shepherd, where he makes a relationship with God which leads him to convert to Christianity. He escapes from his master and eventually makes his way back home where a few years later he has a vision and hears a voice calling him to go back to Ireland.

Patrick went to Europe to study and is ordained priest. And eventually responds to his vision and returns to Ireland. His mission was not easy as he was treated as a foreigner but over the years thousands were baptised and he was made bishop and ordained priests to lead new Christian communities. He was eventually able to claim of the Irish, "Never before did they know of God

except to serve idols. But now they have become the people of the Lord, and are called children of God.”

We remember Patrick most from the way he showed the shamrock with three leaves on one stem to illustrate the Trinity and the prayer known as his breast plate which is on the reverse of your reading sheets.

So what of our gospel, we find Jesus at a moment of decision. The hour when he has to leave this world is coming near and he knows that it will be painful and traumatic. He asks the question, “What shall I say?” There are two possible answers – he could ask the Father to save him from this hour or he could ask the Father to be with him as he goes forward. Rather than thinking of himself and saying “Save me!” he acknowledges what God wants “Glorify your name!” Jesus commits himself to doing what God has sent him to do and all that it would mean.

The question “What shall I say?” or similarly “What shall I do?” or “What path shall I take?” can be a question that we find ourselves asking. We see that Jesus took the path that God wanted him to take. That path involved a painful death but it was a path that was ultimately life-giving not just for himself but for all humanity. We see that Patrick returned to Ireland although he knew there would be opposition and danger but many would learn of God’s love.

In our own lives, taking the path that God would want us to take will often involve some kind of dying for us, such

as giving up our own comfort and convenience, letting go of the plans that we have for ourselves. This can take very ordinary forms. We get a phone call from someone who needs to talk to us, just as we were about to sit down and watch our favourite TV programme. Someone asks us to visit them, and the only opportunity we have for doing that is Saturday afternoon when our team have an important match. The strong temptation is to pray “Father save me from this hour.” Today’s gospel makes it clear that if we use energy in trying to look after ourselves we will lose ourselves. Anyone who loves his life will lose it. If on the other hand, we give ourselves away we will find life. It is the grain of wheat that falls to the earth and dies that bears much fruit.

We are only a week away from Holy Week. During Holy Week we remember Jesus’ readiness to fall to the ground and die for our sakes. As we think about his dying for us we may find ourselves drawn to him. Jesus says, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.” It is in allowing ourselves to be drawn to him that we will find the strength to take the path that he, and later his followers like St Patrick, took, the path of self giving that leads to fullness of life.