

PATRICK OF IRELAND

THE LESSON: A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.
You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.”*
(John 16:20)

The fifth century was a time of great instability. The Roman empire had weakened. Not only was there rebellion from within the empire, but in both the east and the west the empire suffered attacks, eventually bringing about a total collapse. During this time, Rome withdrew from Britain. Some regions were pagan and others had seen large-scale conversions to Christianity. Picture a time of mass migrations of people, raids from warring tribes, and overlords fighting for prominence. This is the setting in which Patrick’s story unfolded.

*“And this is the judgement: the light has come into the world,
and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”*
(John 3:19)

Patrick was born into a believing family in west Britain around the early fifth century. He was the son of a town councillor, and as a youth he didn’t give much thought to God. But as a teenager Patrick was abducted by Irish pirates and forced into slavery for six years. It was during this incredibly hard time that his faith flourished and he came to rely on God for everything. Patrick escaped, and once free he began training for the priesthood, even spending some time studying under Martin of Tours. It was many years later that Patrick found himself back in Ireland, this time as its first bishop.

*“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?”*
(Micah 6:8)

Though Patrick’s status had changed in the world, the same evil things were happening around him. Patrick had been bishop in Ireland for many years when an attack by the tyrannical British warlord Coroticus resulted in many of the Irish who had come under his care being captured. Even today, as we read words from his letter to Coroticus, we can sense Patrick’s outrage and heartbreak:

I am Patrick, yes a sinner and indeed untaught; yet I am established here in Ireland where I profess myself bishop. I am certain in my heart that “all that I am,” I have received from God. So I live among barbarous tribes, a stranger and exile for the love of God... I never would have wanted these harsh words to spill from my mouth; I am not in the habit of speaking so sharply. Yet now I am driven by the zeal of God, Christ’s truth has aroused me. I speak out too for love of my neighbors who are my only sons; for them I gave up my home country, my parents and even pushing my own life to the brink of death. If I have any worth, it is to live my life for God so as to teach these peoples; even though some of them still look down on me...

And so, now you, Coroticus – and your gangsters, rebels all against Christ, now where do you see yourselves? You gave away girls like prizes: not yet women, but baptized. All for some petty temporal gain that will pass in the very next instant...

May God inspire these men sometime to come to their senses in regard to God again, so that they may repent, however latter day, of their grave crimes... and that they free these baptized women whom they have taken, so that then they may deserve to live to God and be made whole once more, here, now and for eternity.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”
(Matthew 5:14)

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Unfortunately, we don't know what happened to the abducted girls, nor whether Patrick's efforts succeeded in calling their captors to repentance. What we do know is that Patrick cared deeply about the people he had been sent to serve – his former captors. He wanted them to come to know Jesus: no matter what their status, because he remembered very clearly those years when he had been without status. During Patrick's ministry, many Irish came to believe and were baptized, and many monasteries were founded and flourished. The monasteries of Ireland went on to become great places of learning, as well as places from which missionaries were sent out.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: DAVID FARMER, "OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS" | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, "THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 1" | ST. PATRICK, "LETTER TO COROTICUS", TRANS. JOHN SKINNER | GERARD SAMPSON, "LAYMAN'S BOOK OF SAINTS".)

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE "FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES", WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of Patrick that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen.

Decide on one concrete action you can take this week based on your reflections.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

O God, our heavenly Father, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst call thy blessed Apostles and send them forth to preach thy Gospel of salvation unto all the nations: We bless thy holy Name for thy servant Patrick, and we pray thee, according to thy holy Word, to send forth many labourers into thy harvest; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A MISSIONARY, P. 314)