



A Meditation for St. Patrick's Day
from Associate Rector, The Rev. Susan Parsons

Dearly beloved,

Randy, Jane and I wanted to send out a short meditation every other day or so to all of you.

Since today is St. Patrick's Day, and most of us, for the most part, are not celebrating the way we wish we could, you'll find below a short biography of St. Patrick as well as an extraordinarily long hymn that people tend to either love or hate. If you wish, you may write me with your vote, and we can decide whether to sing it sometime or not.

We'll begin with the collect for St. Patrick, noting how appropriate it is for this moment in our lives:

"Almighty God, who in your providence chose your servant Patrick to be the apostle of the Irish people, to bring those who were wandering in darkness and error to the true light and knowledge of you: Grant us so to walk in that way that we may come at last to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever."

PATRICK OF IRELAND (17 MAR c461)

Patrick was born about 390, in southwest Britain, somewhere between the Severn and the Clyde rivers, son of a deacon and grandson of a priest. When about sixteen years old, he was kidnapped by Irish pirates and sold into slavery in Ireland. Until this time, he had, by his own account, cared nothing for God, but now he turned to God for help. After six years, he either escaped or was freed, made his way to a port 200 miles away, and there persuaded some sailors to take him onto their ship. He returned to his family much changed, and began to prepare for the priesthood, and to study the Bible.

Around 435, Patrick was commissioned, perhaps by bishops in Gaul and perhaps by the Pope, to go to Ireland as a bishop and missionary. Four years earlier another bishop, Palladius, had gone to Ireland to preach, but he was no longer there (my sources disagree on whether he had died, or had become discouraged and left Ireland to preach in Scotland). Patrick made his headquarters at Armagh in the North, where he built a school, and had the protection of the local monarch. From this base he made extensive missionary journeys, with considerable success.

To say that he single-handedly turned Ireland from a pagan to a Christian country is an exaggeration, but is not far from the truth.

Almost everything we know about him comes from his own writings, available in English in the Ancient Christian Writers series. He has left us an autobiography (called the *Confessio*), a Letter to Coroticus in which he denounces the slave trade and rebukes the British chieftain Coroticus for taking part in it, and the *Lorica* (or "Breastplate" a poem of disputed authorship traditionally attributed to Patrick), a work that has been called "part prayer, part anthem, and part incantation." The *Lorica* is a truly magnificent hymn, found today in many hymnals (usually abridged by the omission of the two stanzas bracketed below). The translation into English as given here is by Cecil Frances Alexander, whose husband was Archbishop of Armagh, and thus the direct successor of Patrick. She published nearly 400 poems and hymns of her own, including the well-known "There is a green hill far away," "Once in royal David's city," "Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult," and "All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small."



THE LORICA, OR, ST PATRICK'S BREASTPLATE

I bind unto myself today
the strong Name of the Trinity,
by invocation of the same,
the Three in One, and One in Three.

I bind this day to me forever,
by power of faith, Christ's Incarnation;
his baptism in the Jordan river;
his death on cross for my salvation;
his bursting from the spiced tomb;
his riding up the heavenly way;
his coming at the day of doom:
I bind unto myself today.

I bind unto myself the power
of the great love of cherubim;
the sweet "Well done" in judgement hour;
the service of the seraphim;
confessors' faith, apostles' word,
the patriarchs' prayers, the prophets' scrolls;
all good deeds done unto the Lord,
and purity of virgin souls.

I bind unto myself today
the virtues of the starlit heaven,
the glorious sun's life-giving ray,
the whiteness of the moon at even,
the flashing of the lightning free,
the whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
the stable earth, the deep salt sea,
around the old eternal rocks.

I bind unto myself today
the power of God to hold and lead,
his eye to watch, his might to stay,
his ear to hearken to my need;
the wisdom of my God to teach,
his hand to guide, his shield to ward;
the word of God to give me speech,
his heavenly host to be my guard.

[Against the demon snares of sin,
the vice that gives temptation force,
the natural lusts that war within,
the hostile men that mar my course;
of few or many, far or nigh,
in every place, and in all hours
against their fierce hostility,
I bind to me these holy powers.

Against all Satan's spells and wiles,
against false words of heresy,
against the knowledge that defiles
against the heart's idolatry,
against the wizard's evil craft,
against the death-wound and the burning

the choking wave and poisoned shaft,
protect me, Christ, till thy returning.]

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the Name,
the strong Name of the Trinity,
by invocation of the same,
the Three in One, and One in Three.
Of whom all nature hath creation,
eternal Father, Spirit, Word:
praise to the Lord of my salvation,
salvation is of Christ the Lord.

An aspect of Patrick's thought that shows very clearly through his writings is his awareness of himself as an unlearned exile, a former slave and a fugitive, who has learned the hard way to put his sole trust in God.

by James Kiefer

If you'd like to listen to St. Patrick's Hymn click this link:
<https://youtu.be/yH4ToVxtn9A>