

A Blessing to Ye

Top o' the mornin' to ye. It's not quite St. Patrick's Day; that will be Saturday. But we're getting a head start on the wearin' of the green. And for celebrating our Irish ancestry – by those who have it and by those who wish they had it.

The person who was to become St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, was born in Wales about A.D. 385. His given name was Maewyn, and he almost didn't get the job of bishop of Ireland because he lacked the required scholarship. Far from being a saint, until he was 16, he considered himself a pagan. At that age, he was sold into slavery by a group of Irish marauders that raided his village. During his captivity, he became closer to God.

He escaped from slavery after six years and went to Gaul, where he studied in the monastery under St. Germain, bishop of Auxerre, for a period of 12 years. During his training, he became aware that his calling was to convert the pagans to Christianity. His wishes were to return to Ireland, but his superiors instead appointed St. Palladius.

But two years later, Palladius transferred to Scotland. Patrick, having adopted that Christian name earlier, was then appointed a second bishop to Ireland.

Patrick was quite successful at winning converts. And this fact upset the Celtic Druids. Patrick was arrested several times, but escaped each time. He traveled throughout Ireland, establishing monasteries across the country. He also set up schools and churches that would aid him in his conversion of the Irish country to Christianity. His mission to Ireland lasted for 30 years. After that time, Patrick retired to County Down. He died on March 17 in A.D. 461. That day has been commemorated as St. Patrick's Day ever since.

Although much Irish folklore surrounds St. Patrick's Day, not much of it is actually substantiated. Some of this includes the belief that Patrick raised people from the dead. He is also said to have given a sermon from a hilltop that drove all the snakes from Ireland. Of course, no snakes were ever native to Ireland, and some people think this is a metaphor for the conversion of the pagans.



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One traditional icon of the day is the shamrock. This stems from a more bona fide Irish tale that tells how Patrick used the three-leafed shamrock to explain the Trinity. He incorporated it in his sermons to represent how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit could all exist as separate elements of the same entity. His followers adopted the custom of wearing a shamrock on his feast day.



The St. Patrick's Day custom came to America in 1737. That was the first year St. Patrick's Day was publicly celebrated in this country, in Boston. There are 34 million U.S. residents who claim Irish ancestry.

So, as you celebrate all things Irish today (as I am) and Saturday, here is an Irish blessing to live by:

*Always remember to forget
The things that made you sad.
But never forget to remember
The things that made you glad.*

Or, as St. Patrick would probably put it: Don't forget to count your blessings, for they are many.

– Beecher Hunter

