St. Patrick's Day

As someone who has Sullivans, Callahans and Smiths in his family tree, in addition to Hunter, St. Patrick's Day is a big deal on the calendar and in the observance of it. Just who was the man for whom the holiday is named?

He was born Patricius in Roman Britain to a relatively wealthy family. When Patrick was 16 years old, he was taken captive in an Irish pirate raid and was sold as a slave to a herdsman in North Ireland. He escaped at age 22 and somehow found his way to Gaul, where he spent some time in a monastic school.

After returning home, he saw a vision and heard voices from the Irish coast, crying, "We beseech thee, child of God, come and walk again among us." He answered the call and returned to Ireland, the country that had enslaved him for six years.

At this time, the Irish were almost wholly unevangelized. They worshiped the elements, saw evil spirits in trees and stones and engaged in magic, even in human sacrifice that was performed by the Druids.

About the year 432 A.D., Patrick gathered people around him in the open fields and preached Christ to them. His burning zeal, deep sincerity and gentleness of manner won peasants and nobility alike. As a result of his obedience to God's call on his life, he planted 200 churches and baptized approximately 100,000 converts. St. Patrick died on March 17, 461.

It is appropriate, then, that Patrick's life and faith be celebrated. What is ironic, however, is that the day has come to stand -- in the minds of many -- for drunkenness and riotous living. Neither Patrick nor the Lord he served are honored by such behavior.

--Beecher Hunter