

Time for the Irish

With St. Patrick's Day straight ahead, how about an Irish blessing:

May your day be touched by a bit of Irish luck, brightened by a song in your heart, and warmed by the smiles of the people you love.

It's my time of the year. And why not? With a family tree that includes branches of Sullivans, Callahans and Smiths, as well as Hunter, St. Patrick's Day is certainly a green-letter date glowing from the calendar.

This year, there could be some confusion about when the holiday should be observed. March 17 is believed to be the date of Patrick's death (about 493 A.D.), and that is generally the center-point of festivities. This year, however, the observance was changed to Saturday, March 15, by the Roman Catholic Church to avoid conflict with Holy Monday that falls on March 17.

True Irish men and women – or their wannabes – don't get caught up in the details. All it means is that we have two days (three, counting Sunday) to celebrate. And that number is being conservative. Lola and I were on Hilton Head Island and in Savannah, Georgia, on Valentine's Day and the weekend, and the St. Patrick's Day activities had already begun.

Just who was St. Patrick? He was the patron saint of Ireland and is one of Christianity's most recognizable figures. Born in Britain to wealthy parents, either toward the end of the fourth century or the beginning of the fifth, there is no early evidence that Patrick was particularly religious. At age 16, he was taken prisoner by a group of Irish raiders who were attacking his family's estate. They transported him to Ireland where he spent six years as a slave in captivity. During this time, he worked as a shepherd, outdoors and away from people. Lonely and afraid, he turned to religion for solace, becoming a devout Christian.

After more than six years as a prisoner, Patrick escaped. According to his writing, God spoke to him in a dream, telling him it was time to leave Ireland. To do so, Patrick walked nearly 200 miles from County Mayo to the Irish coast. Upon returning to his family in Britain, Patrick reported that he experienced a second revelation – an angel in a dream told him to return to Ireland as a missionary. He began religious training, a course of study that lasted more than 15 years. After his ordination as a priest, he was sent to Ireland with a dual mission: to minister to the few Christians already living in Ireland and to begin to convert the Irish. He had spectacular success in changing Ireland from a pagan to a Christian land. Among his teaching tools was the three-leaved shamrock, used to explain the concept of the Holy Trinity – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

I began with an Irish blessing; let me close with one for you:

*May there always be work for your hands to do.
May your purse always hold a coin or two.
May the sun always shine on your windowpane.
May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain.
May the hand of a friend always be near you.
May God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you.*

St. Patrick, I believe, would want all of that for you.

--Beecher Hunter