

ST. PATRICK'S DAY

Gospel: Matthew 13:24-32

Jesus put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

REFLECTION 1: 'A NEEEDY AND DESIROUS PEOPLE'

As we reflect on life as it was on this island of ours in the 5th century, we might observe that Ireland was heavily planted with trees, the plains the grazing grounds for herds of cattle, while the mountains speckled with sheep and goats. At that time the great crime was cattle rustling, which did in fact ignite wars between opposing chieftains. There was a sprinkling of Christianity here and there before Patrick arrived, thanks mainly to a certain Psalladius and companions who had established a few Christian communities before his untimely departure through illness. The Druids were the high-priests of a paganism that worshipped the gods of nature, the sun, moon and stars. Social communication was oral as the written word on vellum was the luxurious preserve of the rich and the learned.

Today we live in times that are turbulent as well as exciting and progressive. In the name of knowledge and the pursuit of information, even the most sacred truths come under scrutiny. People today are interested in spirituality, but our lives are fraught with rampant secularism. The minds and hearts of people are divided between self-expression and freedom on the one hand and on the other, a desire for peace of mind and soul. In these times that are at once brilliant and confused, the figure of St. Patrick provides a model whose example can bring us direction and comfort.

Patrick, we are told, was sent as a missionary bishop to Ireland by Pope Celestine in 432. Now, according to Vatican II documents, a missionary is defined as one who is called and sent with the intention of naming Jesus where he had not been named before – preaching the Gospel and the Kingdom where they have not been preached and gathering the community of the church where this had not been done. The missionary is sent not to a place so much as to a people. This makes a missionary a frontier person who has a definite intention of speaking of Jesus Christ and the kingdom among a people who do not know him. St. Patrick bears continuing testimony to the fact that mission is based, not only on human abilities, but on the power of the Risen Lord. The Spirit of Christ transformed Patrick into a strong and courageous witness for the Kingdom, centred on a deep intimacy with God through personal prayer. John Macquarie speaks of our Celtic forbearers as a 'God-intoxicated people'. St. Patrick was indeed a God-intoxicated man, a God who captivated and moved him to leave his own country, his family and his father's house for the land the Lord would show him.

Revisiting St. Patrick in this day and age, we see that he was truly a man of the Bible. Prayerful reflection on Sacred Scripture was the touchstone of his faith. His writings were salted with quotations from the scriptures, often linking them with experiences of God's grace and human rejection that were part of his life. The Bible was his food and drink – his very sustenance. Being the teacher that he was, he spurs us on today to deeper reflection on the practical wisdom of God's word.

What made Patrick remarkable was his zealous faith. He performed mighty works that made the deeds of the Druids pale by comparison. He had charisma, he preached like Jesus with authority and when he acted his deeds were stunning. Patrick got himself noticed and through him the faith was noticed. Maybe we could ask through our prayers today, that he would rekindle the faith among us Irish whom Patrick once described as being a 'needy and desirous people'.