

HEROES OF THE FAITH

Saint Patrick

Edition 4

Saint Patrick

Biographical Information

NAME:

Patrick (*Latin: Patricius*)

BIRTH:

c. 386 AD in Britain

DEATH:

17 March c. 460 - 493 AD in Ireland

OCCUPATION:

Christian bishop and missionary in Ireland

WRITINGS:

Confessio (a short account of his life)

Letter to the soldiers of Coroticus



Christ beside me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me.



Saint Patrick. Public Domain.

“May the strength of God pilot us, may the wisdom of God instruct us, may the hand of God protect us, may the word of God direct us. Be always ours this day and for evermore.”

~ Saint Patrick ~

Who was Patrick?

"If I have any worth, it is to live my life for God."

SAINT PATRICK was born in Roman Britain at the end of the 4th century AD. He was a Roman of the highest nobility class. His father was a deacon, and his grandfather was a priest in the Christian church. Despite his father's and grandfather's involvement in the church, Patrick, as a young teenager, was not yet a believer in Christ.

At the age of sixteen, he was taken captive and brought to Ireland as a slave, along with thousands of others. Patrick wrote about this experience in a document known as *The Confessio*. He also described how it was in Ireland that he came to believe in God:

"And there the Lord showed me my unbelief, that at length I might remember my iniquities, and strengthen my whole heart towards the Lord my God. He looked down upon my humiliation, and had pity upon my youth and ignorance. He kept me before I knew him, and before I had wisdom or could distinguish between good and evil, he strengthened and comforted me as a father would his son."

Patrick remained a slave for about six years. Throughout that time, he tended sheep, and as he cared for his flock, he began talking to God as one would a friend. So often did he pray that he said as many as a hundred prayers in one day and almost as many at night. He said of those days:

"I remained in the woods, and on the mountain, and even before the dawn, I was roused to prayer, in snow, and ice, and rain, and I felt no injury from it, nor was there any slothfulness in me, as I see now, because the Spirit was then fervent in me."

As Patrick toiled as a shepherd, he grew in faith and fear of God and came to know the love of the one he talked to.

One night, as Patrick lay sleeping, he heard the voice of God telling him, "You shall soon return to your country." The voice spoke again shortly afterwards, saying, "Behold, your ship is ready."

Patrick fled to a port about two hundred miles away and boarded a British ship. As he journeyed home, he was once more taken captive as a slave. The voice of God again came to him one night, saying, "You shall be two months with them." And so he was. Patrick and some of his companions were delivered out of their captors' hands on the sixtieth night. Once they had escaped and reached dry land, they travelled by foot for many weeks. Part of their journey involved twenty-eight days traversing through a desert. They soon ran out of provisions, and in desperation, Patrick's companions said to him, "What say you, O Christian? Your God is great and all-powerful. Can you not pray for us, since we are perishing with

hunger and may never see the face of man again?"

Patrick responded, "Turn sincerely to the Lord my God, to whom nothing is impossible, that He may send us food on our way until we are satisfied, for it abounds everywhere for Him."

Patrick then prayed, and his prayer was soon answered. A drove of swine appeared out of nowhere. Many of the pigs were killed, and the company ate until they were much refreshed. Patrick's companions gave great thanks to God for their miraculous provision. For the remainder of their journey, everyone had enough food to eat, fire for warmth at night and dry weather every day.

When Patrick returned to Britain, he stayed with relations who cared for him like a son. He determined to stay with them as long as he could, until one night, he had a vision. An Irish man named Victorious appeared to him. He held many letters in his hands, one of which he gave to Patrick. The beginning of the epistle contained the words "The Voice of the Irish." As Patrick read these words aloud, he heard Irish voices beseeching him: "We entreat you, holy youth, to come and walk among us still."

Another night, not long afterwards, he heard another voice speaking with eloquent words. He could not understand what was being spoken until the end of the speech, when it was said: "He who gave His life for you is He who speaks in you."

Patrick was deeply moved by the vision he saw and the words he heard. Joy filled his heart, and he knew his Lord was calling him back to Ireland. The people there worshipped "idols and unclean things" and had no knowledge of the Living God in whom Patrick had placed his trust.

Later, as an old man reflecting on his own conversion to the Christian faith, Patrick said, "This I know for certain: that before I was humbled, I was like a stone lying in deep mire until He who is powerful came, and in His mercy raised me up..." Patrick wanted "to make known the gift of God" to other people, and to confidently "spread abroad the name of God everywhere...."

Patrick realised a challenging future awaited him in Ireland. However, he was willing to return there to preach the Gospel, even if it meant he had to endure many persecutions, the loss of his freedom or even death.

Many of his relatives and acquaintances in Britain did not approve of him returning to Ireland as a missionary. They spoke behind his back: "Why does he run into danger among enemies who know not God?" Their disapproval did not deter him from going.

Before his return to Ireland, Patrick trained for the priesthood. He travelled to Gaul, where he was ordained as a priest after several years of study. He arrived in Ireland around 432 AD and began his missionary work.

Patrick journeyed far and wide across Ireland proclaiming the Gospel of Christ wherever he went. His message was received gladly, and thousands and thousands of people turned away from the pagan gods and put their faith in Jesus Christ. Patrick baptised the new believers in water, and they became "the people of God."

An eighteenth-century historical account records how Patrick used the shamrock — a three-leaved clover with a single stalk — to explain the Trinity. In Christian doctrine, the Trinity is one God existing in three Persons: The Father is God, Jesus the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.

Patrick established the first church at a place called Saul in Northern Ireland. Throughout his lifetime, he planted another seven hundred churches all across Ireland. He also ordained seven hundred bishops and three thousand priests.

His missionary work was not without its hardships. His life was constantly threatened with death and violence, and Patrick was imprisoned in chains on at least one occasion. Many of the Irish converts were brutally murdered or stolen away by Patrick's own countrymen, some of whom professed to be Christians themselves. Patrick's fury at this is recorded in a letter to a British tyrant called Coroticus. Patrick wrote how Coroticus's soldiers "devour the people of the Lord as if they were bread."

Although constantly surrounded by danger, Patrick knew the Lord watched over him. He said, "God knows everything before it happens, so — with Him as my witness — I can tell you He used to warn me frequently of trouble in advance."

As he shared the Gospel, other miraculous signs and wonders occurred throughout Patrick's life. He wrote that through his prayers, God even raised people from the dead — a twelfth-century record places this number at thirty-three individuals. Other accounts describe how numerous people were healed from all manner of diseases after Patrick had prayed for them.

When Patrick initially received his calling from God to go to Ireland, he felt inadequate for the task. He thought he lacked the education and ability necessary for God to use him. He later wrote in a letter:

'So listen to me well, "all of you, small and great, everyone who has any fear of God", and especially you wealthy landowners so proud of your education, listen and consider this carefully: God chose foolish little me from among all of you who seem so wise and so expert in the law and "so mighty in deed and word." He picked ignorant me ahead of all of you, even though I am not worthy. He picked me to go forth "with reverence and awe"... to serve the people faithfully. The love of Christ carried me here to be a help to these people for the rest of my life, if I may be worthy, and to work for them with humility and in sincerity.'

Patrick was faithful to his calling as he ministered to the Irish people throughout his lifetime. *The Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland* record that much of Ireland had converted to Christianity through Patrick in just a few decades.

The date of Patrick's death was 17 March, the day that is now celebrated as Saint Patrick's Day around the world.

The year of his death is still uncertain, but some historians place it at approximately 460 AD. Others place it at 493 AD.

