

Dear Friend

This Thursday, 17th March, is St Patrick's Day; the Chicago river has been once again dyed green, and shamrocks and Guinness will no doubt be much in evidence wherever there is an Irish community around the globe - which is pretty much everywhere!

Patrick was born in Britain, in the region of Carlisle. The son of a deacon he was brought up as a Christian although he was, at best, only nominal in his faith. At the age of 16 he was kidnapped by pirates and forced to work as a shepherd in Ireland. During his captivity Patrick turned to God, eventually escaping his captors and returning to Britain. Details of his escape are sketchy, but it is known that he travelled 200 miles from his place of captivity to a seaport after apparently having a dream that a ship was ready to take him home. The adventures and escapades of this journey forged his reliance upon God, and when he finally returned to his family he felt called to be ordained and began his training.

According to tradition, some years later in 431 Patrick, newly consecrated bishop, returned to Ireland. He devoted himself to evangelism, reconciliation amongst local chieftains, and the training of monks and nuns. He made frequent journeys throughout Ireland, and significantly influenced the island for Christ, laying the foundation of the church for years to come.

At some point in his life, Patrick was the subject of a vitriolic attack on his character. In response he wrote the *Confessions* - his personal account of his life. Patrick contrasted himself with learned and powerful men more concerned with political survival than in preaching the gospel. He is revealed as a man who experienced grace in a powerful way, and who chose to evangelise an unreached land in preference to Britain, whilst still remaining attached to his roots as a Romanised Celt, and thus to the Christians of Roman Gaul.

Extract from *Saints on Earth: a biographical companion to Common Worship* by John H Darch and Stuart K Burns.

The Britannica website describes him in this way: The phenomenal success of Patrick's mission is not, however, the full measure of his personality. Since his writings have come to be better understood, it is increasingly recognized that, despite their occasional incoherence, they mirror a truth and a simplicity of the rarest quality. Not since St. Augustine of Hippo had any religious diarist bared his inmost soul as Patrick did in his writings. As D.A. Binchy, the most austerely critical of Patrician (i.e., of Patrick) scholars, put it, "The moral and spiritual greatness of the man shines through every stumbling sentence of his 'rustic' Latin."

Let's leave the final words to Patrick himself in his famous prayer known as *St Patrick's Breastplate*:

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

I arise today
Through the strength of Christ's birth with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension,
Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of doom.

I arise today
Through the strength of the love of cherubim,
In the obedience of angels,
In the service of archangels,
In the hope of resurrection to meet with reward,
In the prayers of patriarchs,
In the predictions of prophets,
In the preaching of apostles,
In the faith of confessors,
In the innocence of holy virgins,
In the deeds of righteous men.

I arise today, through
The strength of heaven,
The light of the sun,
The radiance of the moon,
The splendour of fire,
The speed of lightning,
The swiftness of wind,
The depth of the sea,
The stability of the earth,
The firmness of rock.

I arise today, through
God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me
From snares of devils,
From temptation of vices,
From everyone who shall wish me ill,
afar and near.

I summon today
All these powers between me and those evils,
Against every cruel and merciless power
that may oppose my body and soul,
Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of witches and smiths and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul;
Christ to shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me an abundance of reward.

Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

Shorter versions are also available!

Finally, in spite of all that is happening in Ukraine and elsewhere, we must remember to keep smiling:

Why do we wear shamrocks on St Patrick's Day? Because real rocks are too heavy! (Found on countryliving.com)

With my love and prayers

Simon