



ST. VINCENT DE PAUL REGIONAL SEMINARY

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RECTOR'S CONFERENCE

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“The Pastoral Principles of Patrick”

Apparently, during last year's March Rector's Conference in which I spoke of St. Joseph as our model and guide, I mentioned that to give equal time to our March saints I would speak of St. Patrick in the coming year. This had completely escaped me until a second year man reminded me a couple of weeks ago, so the conference I was preparing on “Men of Communion” took a back seat until next month in order to prevent the Irish and the Italians from fighting. Joe-Paddy forever!

I want to lift up for us St. Patrick as a model of pastoral charity from his experiences in Ireland. The new *Ratio Fundamentalis* reminds us that the four dimensions of formation must be seen through a “unifying lens” and that “together, these dimensions give shape and structure the identity of the seminarian and the priest, and make him capable of that ‘gift of self to Church’, which is the essence of pastoral charity. The entire journey of formation must never be reduced to a single aspect to the detriment of others, but it must always be an integrated journey of the disciple called to priesthood” (#3). Thus, I wish to highlight the following five areas of St. Patrick's life and ministry that reveal just such a journey of integration and stand as his principles of pastoral charity: St. Patrick as a man of forgiveness, deep prayer, missionary zeal, spiritual warrior, and finally his impact as one good and holy man that really made a difference in the world.

Therefore, our first point is that of **forgiveness**. This is a common theme for all Christians and especially as we have recently emerged out of the Jubilee of Mercy. We all know how very fundamental this is to the very essence of Christianity, yet we often fail miserably even within our own community and families. So let us think about St. Patrick for a moment and the sufferings of his life. Here is a man who at the age of 16 is kidnapped by Irish raiders from his homeland in Great Britain and sold into slavery. Ironically, he was forced to work as a shepherd! During these six years of isolation away from family and homeland, he developed a profound relationship with God. At twenty-two, he made a courageous escape and the treacherous journey home, never losing hope and faith in his Good Shepherd to lead him.

Now here comes the forgiveness. As he returns to family and homeland and realizes his vocation to the priesthood, he feels called to return to the very people who had enslaved him. He follows Christ's injunction perfectly of praying for his persecutors and loving his enemies, to the point of wanting to become one with them in his mission. That is heroic forgiveness!

This forgiveness was born from a deep relationship with the Triune God in prayer. So when we think of Patrick we must think not of green beer or the Joe-Paddy festival, we must think of the man of **deep prayer** that he was. I had the privilege of working at a retreat center in Ireland one summer and one of my favorite experiences was that of climbing Croagh Patrick in County Mayo.

This is the mountain where St. Patrick spent forty days in prayer and fasting in the year 441 before his work of evangelization. The Irish do this pilgrimage barefoot and I was foolish enough to join in, heck I was 22! This barren rock was a place of deep encounter and preparation for his ministry. Patrick knew his total dependence on God and remained in communion with him as he came down from the mountain and began his mission. Likewise, for us who are called into the mission field we are called to be men of deep prayer, not a superficial or simply ritualistic prayer, but a prayer that transforms our expectant hearts into Shepherds after the Heart of Christ.

The life of prayer embodied by St. Patrick enflamed his heart with **missionary zeal**. A zeal that led him to be creative and courageous in his proclamation of the Gospel to a people who did not know God. He was preaching in a pagan environment shaped by the Druids who had their own longstanding customs and traditions, and let's just say that their spiritual leaders did not take kindly to the foreigner who came with strange messages as he preached against their Celtic polytheism. Thus the creative legend of Patrick teaching the Triune God by way of the shamrock. Having learned the language of the people during his years of captivity, he used creative way to communicate the truths of Christ to them (thus the importance of our study of our pastoral language!). Imagine the courage it must have taken to boldly go and embrace the people as his own despite the hardships and persecutions he would endure. His missionary zeal led to the conversion of an entire nation as he writes that he "baptized thousands of people." Can we be as creative and courageous for the New Evangelization of today? Realistically we are now living in a pagan world, or at least a world where God and organized religion are seen as antithetical to the freedom of the individual. Not so different from the druids of Patrick's day are those who consider themselves "spiritual" but not religious – these are the people we are sent to serve and speak to their hearts with our words which need to be enflamed with the Holy Spirit in order to pierce their hearts with the truth of Christ. Florida and Georgia were evangelized by men who left their homeland of St. Patrick's emerald Isle to bring the Good News to a hard land that did not know the Catholic faith. They laid down their lives tirelessly as circuit riders going from mission to mission in order to spread the faith. Can we be the next generation of priests, like our forefathers from Ireland to convert Florida and Georgia and beyond?

Throughout his years as a missionary in Ireland, I believe he must have understood the dire need to protect himself from the negative influence of the pagan culture all around him and engage in **Spiritual Warfare**. I believe the best example of this is the incredible prayer that he wrote which has come down to us as "St. Patrick's Breastplate." He wrote it in 433 A.D. for divine protection before successfully converting the Irish King Leoghaire and his subjects from paganism to Christianity. He knew to cloak himself in protection and not rely on his own skills and talents to be enough. He was aware of the evils around him "seen and unseen." St. Paul counsels us: "For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens" (Eph. 6:12). Therefore, I share the full version of the prayer as it has come down to us:

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 splendor 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.

This man was a spiritual warrior! I encourage each of us to follow his example and to put on the “Armor of God” as St. Paul encourages us in Ephesians 6:10-17. My mother taught me to do this since I was young and I believe that many a day it has preserved me from being beaten in the battle by the enemy of our human nature (explain how I pray this verse daily). Do not be so sophisticated to believe that the evil one does not exist and that he does not want to drag you down as a man discerning priesthood.

As we highlight St. Patrick this evening, I want each of us to recognize the call of the saints to **make a difference in the world** around them. The reality is that one good and holy man or woman really can make a difference as we have seen throughout the ages in the Church. Patrick changed the course of history and evangelized an entire nation of pagans – we need just such men today. Saints like John Vianney who through his fidelity to the confessional drew many souls to Christ; saints like Archbishop Oscar Romero who through his preaching challenged a nation and its government to change (we just celebrated this new Beato’s feast last Friday 3/24). A group of us priest just re-watched [Romero](#) for probably the fifth time and at one point he prays the simplest and most profound prayer that every saint must make, that of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane: “I can’t ... You must ... I’m Yours ... Show me the way!” When we begin to pray like that, when we surrender everything to the Lord, then the Almighty can do great things through us, and holy is His name!

Like St. Patrick, we must become “another Christ” for the world. Only as an *alter Christus* will we fulfill our calling and mission. We become such by following the pastoral plan of Patrick by being men of forgiveness, deep prayer-ers, filled with missionary zeal, spiritual warriors, and never despairing because we are united together as a band of brothers to go into the world to transform it for Christ. This is our mission should we chose to accept it. On Saturday our brothers will lay down their lives in the ordination rite; they will die, but they will arise as new men in Christ.

Never despair, never fear because by Baptism, Confirmation, and Ordination we too can pray with Patrick:

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, when we arise from the floor of ordination to be men for others [*bis*]. St. Patrick, good shepherd of the flock entrusted to your care, pray for us.