

St. Patrick



c.387-461

Feast Day:
March 17

The Patron Saint of Ireland, Patrick was born near the west coast of Britain, the son of a Roman civil servant.

At age 16, Patrick was carried off by Irish pirates and sold as a slave in Ireland, where he worked as a shepherd for six years. During this time he became very religious, spending long hours in prayer and meditation. Patrick finally escaped Ireland on a ship sailing to the European continent. He was reunited with his family in Britain, and soon began to study for the priesthood; then he spent 15 years in a monastery.

A dream he had many years earlier convinced Patrick that God was calling him to return to Ireland as a missionary. In 432 he was consecrated a bishop and sent to preach the Gospel to the Irish people.

He went to the northern and western parts of the island, which Christian missionaries had not yet reached. There were some believers in Ireland, but Patrick had many obstacles to overcome. The Irish people were mostly pagan and did not welcome Patrick. An Irish chieftain tried to kill Patrick, but Patrick converted the chieftain to Christianity. Patrick traveled all over Ireland and preached to people about God. He used a shamrock, a little plant that has three leaves from one stem, to help explain the Blessed Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and all three are God.

St. Patrick ordained priests, established dioceses, and founded several monasteries. Irish missionaries who revitalized the Church after the fall of Rome can be traced back to St. Patrick's evangelizing activities. He died in the town of Saul, the same town where he had built the first church in Ireland. His feast day is celebrated on March 17, the day he died.