

## Father Barrett's Homily for St. Patrick's Day Solemnity

***First Reading: Jeremiah 1; 4-9; Psalm: 23 (Sung); Second Reading: Acts of the Apostles, 13; 46-49; Gospel: Luke 10; 1-12, 17-20***

BEFORE I FORMED YOU IN THE WOMB I KNEW YOU, WE HEAR OUR LORD SPEAKING TO JEREMIAH IN THE FIRST READING. BEFORE YOU WERE BORN I DEDICATED YOU.

ST. PATRICK MUST HAVE BEEN A DEEPLY SPIRITUAL MAN WHO WAS AN INTELLECTUAL WHEN YOU SEE WHAT HE WROTE AND HOW HE CHANGED IRELAND. RESPECTING ITS OWN NATURE WITH PAGAN TRIBES THAT HE WANTED TO BRING THEM CLOSER TO OUR LORD. AFTER BEING KIDNAPPED AND SPENDING SIX YEARS TAKING CARE OF SHEEP IN THE COUNTRY OF IRELAND, HE HAD TIME TO PRAY AND TO WONDER WHAT GOD WANTED FROM HIM AND WHAT DID IRELAND NEED, A COUNTRY HE GREW TO LOVE. HE DEVELOPED A DEEP LOVE FOR IRELAND, BUT AS A SLAVE AND HAVING TO LEARN IRISH, WE WAS ABLE TO THINK MORE AND MORE ABOUT HIMSELF AND HIS SURROUNDINGS. HE HAD A DISTANCE FROM THE PEOPLE WHO WERE COMMITTED TO PAGAN WAYS OF WORSHIP AND HE KNEW GOD WANTED THEM TO DISCOVER HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST.

HE REFLECTED ON THE WORLD OF NATURE AND HE WAS CUT OFF FROM HIS OWN UPBRINGING THAT MAY NOT HAVE ALLOWED HIM TO THINK AND PRAY. LIFE WITHOUT CHRIST FOR PATRICK WAS EMPTY. HE BEGAN TO DISCOVER HOW JESUS WAS WITH HIM AND TEACHING HIM THROUGH PRAYER, AND MORE PRAYER, AND HELPED PATRICK BETTER TO SEE HIMSELF. WHAT ELSE COULD YOU DO UP ON A MOUNTAIN ALL DAY WITH SHEEP AND ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO? HE MUST HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT THE WORDS FOR JEREMIAH THAT BEFORE I FORMED YOU IN THE WOMB I KNEW YOU. CHRIST WAS ALWAYS PRESENT IN PATRICK'S LIFE, EACH DAY, AND HE NEVER FELT ALONE.

HE NEVER FELT THAT HE WAS GOING TO STAY IN THE MOUNTAINS AWAY FROM THE WORLD. PROOF OF THAT IS TO SEE HOW CONFIDENT HE WAS WHEN HE WAS IN IRELAND AS A MISSIONARY. HE LOVED THE WORLD GIVEN TO US BY GOD AND WANTED TO MAKE THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND UNDERSTAND THE WORLD WITH FAITH AND WITH CULTURE TO SEE WHAT THEIR OWN LIVES WERE ABOUT. HE WAS A MISSIONARY EVEN AS WE ARE MISSIONARIES BRINGING OUR FAITH AND CULTURE TO THE WORLD, EVEN WITH SONG AND DANCE, POETRY AND LITERATURE.

NEW YORK'S CATHOLIC HISTORY IS FILLED WITH THE IRISH—INCLUDING ALL MY GRANDPARENTS—AND IN THE BEGINNINGS THERE WERE ONLY FIFTEEN IRISH PRIESTS TAKING CARE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE. IN 1860 THERE WERE THIRTY ONE CHURCHES ON MANHATTAN ISLAND. OF THESE, TWENTY TWO WERE IRISH PARISHES, EIGHT GERMAN, AND ONE FRENCH, ACCORDING TO MSGR. COHALAN, A RENOWNED HISTORIAN OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK. AT THE TIME THERE WERE ABOUT 800 THOUSAND CATHOLICS. POOR CATHOLICS, AND PARTICULARLY THE IRISH, WHO WERE DRIVEN BY THE STRENGTH OF ST. PATRICK'S LIFE, EVEN WITH ALL THEIR STRUGGLE AND THE DENIAL THEY EXPERIENCED FROM SOCIETY, AND THEY WERE MISSIONARIES. THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS BRINGING THEIR FAITH AND CULTURE, AND WE ARE PART OF THAT MISSION TO BRING CHRIST INTO FAMILIES, SOCIETY AND OUR OWN FRIENDS LIVES.

IN THE BREASTPLATE PRAYER HE PRAYS: "CHRIST IN THE HEART OF EVERY MAN WHO THINKS OF ME, / CHRIST IN THE MOUTH IN EVERYONE WHO SPEAKS OF ME, / CHRIST IN EVERY EYE THAT SEES ME, / CHRIST IN EVERY EAR THAT HEARS ME."

ELSEWHERE ST. PATRICK WROTE:

"WHEN I CAME TO IRELAND, I TENDED HERDS EVERY DAY. I USED TO PRAY MANY TIMES DURING THE DAY. MORE AND MORE, MY LOVE OF GOD AND MY REVERENCE FOR HIM BEGAN TO INCREASE. MY FAITH

GREW STRONGER AND ZEAL SO INTENSE THAT IN THE COURSE OF A SINGLE DAY I WOULD SAY AS MANY AS ONE HUNDRED PRAYERS AND ALMOST AS MANY IN THE NIGHT.”

THE REVERENCE FOR GOD DEEPENED AS HE BEHELD NATURE OF CREATION IN A DIRECT WAY IN THE QUIET OF THE HILLS OF IRELAND—AND EVEN THE RAIN—AND HIS ZEAL LED HIM TO FOLLOW CHRIST AND WANT TO BRING CHRIST TO OTHERS. BEFORE YOU WERE BORN I DEDICATED YOU.

IN HIS BREASTPLATE PRAYER ST. PATRICK LIFTS HIS HEART TO CONTEMPLATE GOD: I ARISE TODAY /THROUGH THE STRENGTH OF HEAVEN;/ LIGHT OF THE SUN,/ RADIANCE OF MOON,/ SPLENDOR OF FIRE,/ SPEED OF LIGHTNING,/ SWIFTNESS OF WIND,/ DEPTH OF SEA,/ STABILITY OF EARTH,/ FIRMNESS OF ROCK.

MY SISTERS AND BROTHERS, DO WE PRAY? ARE THE INCLINATIONS THAT TOUCH OUR HEART FOR GOD? DO WE ATTEMPT TO PRAY A HUNDRED TIMES A DAY? WHEN WE WAKE UP DURING THE NIGHT, DO WE PRAY? AND WHAT ARE WE PRAYING ABOUT? WORSHIP OF GOD, THANKS TO HIM FOR ALL WE HAVE, TELLING HIM WE ARE SORRY FOR OUR SINS AND JUST TO BE IN HIS PRESENCE AND ADORE HIM?

ST. PATRICK LEADS US TO BE A NATION OF GOD, PEOPLE WHO REACH INTO THE SOULS AND HEARTS OF ALL THOSE AROUND US, OUR PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT IS JUST A WAY TO TELL SOULS AROUND US THAT THEY SHOULD BELIEVE JESUS CHRIST LOVES US AND HAS DIED FOR US. WE MUST REACH FAMILIES, YOUNG PEOPLE, THE POOR AND THE LONELY, THE SICK AND DISABLED AND, ABOVE ALL, THE PERSONS IN OUR SOCIETY WHO GENERATE IDEAS AND GOALS—UNIVERSITIES, MEDIA, INTERNET, MOVIES AND TELEVISION, VIDEO GAMES, INSTAGRAM AND SNAPCHAT—WHICH ARE POOR GUIDANCE FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHOSEN BY GOD.

FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES WE READ: BOTH PAUL AND BARNABAS SPOKE OUT BOLDLY ... FOR SO THE LORD COMMANDED US, "I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BE AN INSTRUMENT OF SALVATION TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH."

JESUS WANTS US TO SPEAK BOLDLY ABOUT HIM AS PAUL AND BARNABAS, JUST AS ST. PATRICK, THE MISSIONARY, DID. ST. PATRICK'S BOLDNESS WAS NOT PUSHY OR OVERWHELMING OR FRIGHTENING, BUT WAS FIRM AND GENTLE BOLDNESS, MEEK AS THE MEEKNESS OF OUR LORD, AS A GOOD SHEPHERD WHICH HE HAD HAD TO DO FOR SIX YEARS.

ALL THE EARTH IS WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN TO US, EVERY CORNER OF CIVILIZATION, THOSE THAT ARE CHRISTIAN AND THOSE THAT ARE FAR FROM OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH. GOD CAME FOR ALL, NOT FOR SOME. ALL HE CREATED AND ALL HE REDEEMED BECAUSE ALL ARE THE PERSONS OF THE HUMAN RACE. BUT GOD HAS CHOSEN US AS CATHOLICS, ESPECIALLY THE IRISH CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE, TO LEAD OTHERS, TO SEEK CHRIST, TO FIND CHRIST, TO FOLLOW HIM AND TO LOVE ABOVE ALL JESUS CHRIST.

IN THE GOSPEL WE HEAR OUR LORD JESUS TELL THE DISCIPLES: DO NOT REJOICE BECAUSE THE SPIRITS ARE SUBJECT TO YOU, BUT REJOICE BECAUSE YOUR NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN.

I HAVE SPENT MANY YEARS IN PLACES WHERE ST PATRICK IS NOT CELEBRATED AS IT IS IN NEW YORK AREA, PARTICULARLY HERE IN MANHATTAN. LET US MAKE TODAY A SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND NOT ALLOW IT TO BECOME TOO MATERIAL AND BE SOMETHING THAT WOULD DISAPPOINT ST. PATRICK. LET US ASK OUR MOTHER, WHO LOVED CHRIST ABOVE ALL, TO TEACH US TO LOVE HIM WITH CONFIDENCE AND OPENNESS.