



LOVE MERCY: Patrick (385-461)

From Patrick's *Letter to Coroticus* "the tyrant—a man who has no respect for God or his priests."

I am Patrick....I am established here in Ireland where I profess myself a bishop. I am certain that in my heart 'all that I am' I have received from God. So I live among barbarous tribes, a stranger and exile for the love of God...I am not in the habit of speaking so sharply. Yet now I am driven by the zeal of God, Christ's truth has aroused me. I speak out too for the love of my neighbors who are my only sons....

I myself have composed and written these words with my own hand so that they can be given and handed over to the soldiers of Coroticus...those who are now become citizens of demons by reason of their evil works. [Coroticus and his gangsters] have chosen, by their hostile deeds, to live in death,...bloody men who have steeped themselves in the blood of innocent Christians....It is unlawful to flatter men like these, nor should you eat or drink in their company...not until the time comes when they agree to free those servants of God and the baptized handmaids of Christ. My chief request is that anyone who is a servant of God be reading and willing to carry this letter forward...may it be read aloud before the whole people—Yes, even when Coroticus himself is present. May God inspire these men sometime to come to their senses in regard to God again, so that they may repent of their grave crimes of homicide...and that they free these baptized women whom they have taken so that they may deserve to live to God and be made whole once more, here, now and for eternity.

From Patrick's *Confession*

My name is Patrick. I am a sinner, a simple country person, and the least of all believers. I am looked down upon by many. My father was Calpornius. He was a deacon; his father was Potitus, a priest, who lived at Bannavem Taburniae. His home was near there, and that is where I was taken prisoner. I was about sixteen at the time. At that time, I did not know the true God. I was taken into captivity in Ireland, along with thousands of others. We deserved this, because we had gone away from God, and did not keep his commandments. We would not listen to our priests, who advised us about how we could be saved. The Lord brought his strong anger upon us, and scattered us among many nations even to the ends of the earth. It was among foreigners that it was seen how little I was.

It was there that the Lord opened up my awareness of my lack of faith. Even though it came about late, I recognized my failings. So I turned with all my heart to the Lord my God, and he looked down on my lowliness and had mercy on my youthful ignorance. He guarded me before I knew him, and before I came to wisdom and could distinguish between good and evil. He protected me and consoled me as a father does for his son.

That is why I cannot be silent – nor would it be good to do so – about such great blessings and such a gift that the Lord so kindly bestowed in the land of my captivity. This is how we can repay such blessings, when our lives change and we come to know God, to praise and bear witness to his great wonders before every nation under heaven....He said through the prophet: 'Call on me in the day of your distress, and I will set you free, and you will glorify me.' Again he said: 'It is a matter of honour to reveal and tell forth the works of God.' Although I am imperfect in many ways, I want my brothers and relations to know what I'm really like, so that they can see what it is that inspires my life....

After I arrived in Ireland, I tended sheep every day, and I prayed frequently during the day. More and more the love of God increased, and my sense of awe before God. Faith grew, and my spirit was moved, so that in one day I would pray up to one hundred times, and at night perhaps the same. I even remained in the woods and on the mountain, and I would rise to pray before dawn in snow and ice and rain. I never felt the worse for it, and I never felt lazy – as I realise now, the spirit was burning in me at that time.

It was there one night in my sleep that I heard a voice saying to me: "You have fasted well. Very soon you will return to your native country." Again after a short while, I heard a someone saying to me: "Look – your ship is ready." It was not nearby, but a good two hundred miles away. I had never been to the place, nor did I know anyone there. So I ran away then, and left the man with whom I had been for six years. It was

in the strength of God that I went – God who turned the direction of my life to good; I feared nothing while I was on the journey to that ship.....

A few years later I was again with my parents in Britain. They welcomed me as a son, and they pleaded with me that, after all the many tribulations I had undergone, I should never leave them again. It was while I was there that I saw, in a vision in the night, a man whose name was Victoricus coming as it were from Ireland with so many letters they could not be counted. He gave me one of these, and I read the beginning of the letter, the voice of the Irish people. While I was reading out the beginning of the letter, I thought I heard at that moment the voice of those who were beside the wood of Voclut, near the western sea. They called out as it were with one voice: "We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us." This touched my heart deeply, and I could not read any further; I woke up then. Thanks be to God, after many years the Lord granted them what they were calling for. Another night – I do not know, God knows, whether it was within me or beside me – I heard authoritative words which I could hear but not understand, until at the end of the speech it became clear: "The one who gave his life for you, he it is who speaks in you"; and I awoke full of joy.....

So I am first of all a simple country person, a refugee, and unlearned. I do not know how to provide for the future. But this I know for certain, that before I was brought low, I was like a stone lying deep in the mud. Then he who is powerful came and in his mercy pulled me out, and lifted me up and placed me on the very top of the wall. That is why I must shout aloud in return to the Lord for such great good deeds of his, here and now and forever, which the human mind cannot measure. So be amazed, all you people great and small who fear God! You well-educated people in authority, listen and examine this carefully. Who was it who called one as foolish as I am from the middle of those who are seen to be wise and experienced in law and powerful in speech and in everything? If I am most looked down upon, yet he inspired me, before others, so that I would faithfully serve the nations with awe and reverence and without blame: the nations to whom the love of Christ brought me. His gift was that I would spend my life, if I were worthy of it, to serving them in truth and with humility to the end.....In the knowledge of this faith in the Trinity... It is right to spread abroad the name of God faithfully and without fear, so that even after my death I may leave something of value to the many thousands of my brothers and sisters – the children whom I baptized in the Lord. I didn't deserve at all that the Lord would grant such great grace, after hardships and troubles, after captivity, and after so many years among that people. It was something which, when I was young, I never hoped for or even thought of.

So I'll never stop giving thanks to my God, who kept me faithful Whatever comes about for me, good or bad, I ought to accept them equally and give thanks to God. He has shown me that I can put my faith in him without wavering and without end. However ignorant I am, he has heard me, so that in these late days I can dare to undertake such a holy and wonderful work. In this way I can imitate somewhat those whom the Lord foretold would announce his gospel in witness to all nations before the end of the world. This is what we see has been fulfilled. Look at us: we are witnesses that the gospel has been preached right out to where there is nobody else there!

Could I have come to Ireland without thought of God, merely in my own interest? Who was it made me come? For here I am a prisoner of the Spirit so that I may not see any of my family. Can it be out of the kindness of my heart that I carry out such a labor of mercy on a people who once captured me?...I am a slave in Christ to this faraway people for the indescribable glory of 'everlasting life which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.' (*Letter to Coroticus*)

Breastplate prayer of Saint Patrick

Christ to protect me today
against poison, against burning, against drowning, against wounding,
so that there may come abundance of reward.
Christ is 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 where I lie, Christ where I sit, Christ where I arise,
Christ in the heart of every one who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every one who speaks of me.
Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.

