

1 Lent C

March 10, 2019

St. Patrick

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An Irishman moved into a tiny village in County Kerry, walks into the pub and promptly orders three beers. The bartender raises his eyebrows, but serves the man three beers, which he drinks quietly at a table, alone.

The next evening the man again orders and drinks three beers at a time. In fact, it becomes a nightly ritual, such that the entire town begins whispering about the “Man who orders three beers.”

Finally, a week later, the bartender broaches the subject on behalf of the town. “I don’t mean to pry, but folks around here are wondering why you always order three beers.”

“Tis odd, isn’t it?” the man replied. “You see, I have two brothers, and one went to America, and the other to Australia. We promised each other that we would always order an extra two beers whenever we drank as a way of keeping up the family bond.”

The bartender and the whole town was pleased with this answer, and soon the “Man who orders three beers” became a local celebrity and a source of pride to the village. Folks sometimes came to the pub just to watch him drink.

Then, one day, the man came in and ordered only two beers. The bartender poured them with a heavy heart. The next day, he orders only two beers. The word flies around town; prayers are offered for the soul of one of his brothers.

Finally, toward the end of the week, the bartender says to the man, “Folks around here, me first of all, want to offer condolences to you for the death of your brother. You know--the two beers and all...”

The man ponders this for a moment, then replies, “You’ll be happy to hear that my two brothers are alive and well. It’s just that I, meself, have decided to give up drinking for Lent.”

Throughout the Sundays of Lent, for the second reading, the church each Sunday goes to the letters of St. Paul and offers us the gems of God’s Word, teaching us about the dying and rising of Jesus. Today we hear the Apostle Paul proclaim

**boldly: “...If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”**

As you drive closer to many of our West Tennessee towns—like Selmer or Dyersburg—there are signs pointing out two different routes. There’s the “by-pass” around the town—quick, easy, effortless. And there’s the “business” route right through the center of the town—slow, at times testing your patience. It’s the same here in Memphis: To get to the other side of the city, like Germantown, oh—I take the expressway around the city. I get tired of Poplar and Union, getting caught in the messy stop-and-go traffic with all the traffic lights and congestion.

Two routes: The “by-pass” and the “business” route. Friends: The clear message of Lent is this: We can’t celebrate the new life of Easter without going right through the messiness and suffering of the cross. We can’t take the “by-pass” around the cross; we’ve got to take the “business” route right through it.

What’s that messy “business” route through the cross mean in our lives? I’d much rather just go around and by-pass a resentment that eats at me; or, an addiction that controls me. I don’t want to go through the messiness of a grief or sadness; I’d rather by-pass them. I’d rather “by-pass” the hurts of the people in our neighborhood, rather than looking them in the eye and truly seeing them—and their hurts. We all want to get to new life, Jesus’ risen life, but don’t want to go through the inner disarray and clutter of what causes anguish, fear, and remorse. *They* can be the cross in our lives.

Sisters and brothers: We can’t take the “by-pass” around the cross. We’ve got to take the “business” route right through the cross. Only then shall we get to the resurrection. Only then will we experience the true joy of Easter and share in Jesus’ risen life.

**“...If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”**

Earlier this past week Pope Francis announced his appointment of our new bishop for West Tennessee, Bishop David Talley. In his first public comments to us, Bishop Talley alluded to this key teaching by the Apostle Paul this Sunday. Bishop Talley said, “I’m going to be here every day and every night, proclaiming ‘Jesus is Lord.’ That’s my job.”

St. Patrick’s: That’s our job, too. We can’t truly proclaim that “Jesus is Lord,” unless we travel through the messiness of the dyings in our own life. Out of that

anguish, there comes the new life of Jesus' resurrection. To get to his new life, we've got to go through the business route—the anguish and hard work of our dyings—in order to get to his risen life, his Easter victory. That's *our* job—to proclaim, **“Jesus is Lord.”**

*General Intercessions*

*First Sunday of Lent*

*March 10, 2019*

**Cleanse us inwardly as Christ leads us, his church, in these forty days of Lent; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Satisfy those who hunger in body, mind, or spirit; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Empower our newly-appointed Bishop of Memphis, David Talley, to lead wisely, to serve humbly, and to enlist us to join with him in crafting our future boldly; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Prepare with your Holy Spirit our six teenagers who will celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation next Sunday; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Show mercy to those who suffer trauma, depression, injustice, or illness; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Raise to new life all who have died, especially the 23 persons who were killed in the Alabama tornadoes, and all who die in natural disasters; we pray to you, O Lord—**

