

5 Lent B

March 21, 2021

St. Patrick

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**“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death....He learned obedience through what he suffered...”**

**“Jesus offered up prayers...with loud cries and tears...”**

Have you ever imagined Jesus with his face streaked with tears, wailing at the top of his voice to his heavenly Father? As his destiny with the cross came slowly into sharper focus, Jesus wept uncontrollably—in those early mornings when he went out to pray alone; and, as he flung himself, face down, to the ground at Gethsemane, the night before he was tortured and murdered.

**“Jesus offered up prayers...with loud cries and tears...”**

Exactly a year ago we began to face the reality of the pandemic, and masks became our daily covering. Over these long months, **“loud cries and tears”** have echoed in many of us—those who learned they had Covid-19 and feared its force; those on the front lines, exhausted and drained, unable to shake off the suffering they have seen; those who have felt terribly alone and isolated; and those who have faced a loved one dying. Yes, as we edge closer to the heart of our faith in these coming days—remembering Jesus’ suffering and agonizing death, while also celebrating his resurrection from the dead—many of us have joined with Jesus **“with loud cries and tears.”**

Of course, March 17<sup>th</sup>, four days ago, we celebrated our patronal feast, that of St. Patrick. We know to wear green and how loved he is by the Irish. Many of us, however, don’t know St. Patrick joined in Jesus’ symphony of **“loud cries and tears.”** First, *he* wasn’t even Irish. As a boy at the end of the fourth century, St. Patrick lived a comfortable life with his family in Wales, then the western coast of Roman Britain. At the age of 16, however, Patrick was kidnapped by Irish robbers and then taken to Ireland as a slave. Plucked violently from his family, Patrick was made to do menial jobs, like herding livestock on the deserted mountains of northern Ireland. The beasts he cared for were more valued than he—a slave. Patrick later wrote: “I was chastened exceedingly and humbled every day in hunger and nakedness” (1).

Destitute, alone, ripped away from those he loved, Patrick prayed often during the day and night. In the midst of those **“loud cries and tears,”** he experienced God’s love for him.

Then, six years a slave, he made a daring stab at an escape. He had to walk some two hundred miles to the coast and begged to catch a ship. Long after that, he rejoined his parents—a changed young man with a vibrant faith, yet scarred within. Eventually Patrick discerned a calling to be a priest. Strangely, though, Patrick had a series of dreams, with Irish voices of those who had stolen his youth, saying again and again, “We beseech thee to come and walk once more among us.” Against the objections of his superiors, Patrick returned to Ireland—to a people he could have well hated. He served them as a bishop for thirty years and, not Irish by birth, he became the beloved patron of Ireland.

As Jesus’ hour of suffering drew near, we hear him say in today’s Gospel, **“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”**

Death and new life—that, Friends, is the pattern for those who want to be Jesus’ disciples. Death and new life, intermingled **“with loud cries and tears.”**

It’s our parish patron’s story, that of St. Patrick. It’s our Savior’s story which we’re about to celebrate anew. By grace, may it become *our* story.

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(1) Quoted by Robert Ellsberg in *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company), pg. 122. See his account on pages 121-123, from which I drew St. Patrick’s story.

*General Intercessions*

*March 21, 2021*

*5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent B*

**Strengthen us to live out with hope the mystery of Jesus' dying and rising; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Prepare throughout the Church the Elect who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil, as well as all those who will come into full communion with us and celebrate the Easter sacraments; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Reconcile warring nations, and unite all people in care for the earth and for the world's poor; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Prompt many in these coming days to celebrate your gracious forgiveness, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as we all prepare for the Easter festivities; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Return to health those who suffer from Covid-19; safeguard those who have received the vaccine; give us care in protecting others from the coronavirus; and deepen hope within us all; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Grant everlasting life to those who have died with their hope fixed on you, especially as we pray for Elsa Perez; we pray to you, O Lord--**

