

*Did you know . . .*

## St. Patrick, Apostle to Ireland

This week...on Saturday, March 17...we celebrate the Patron Saint of our church (Watertown's St. Patrick Church). St. Patrick is remembered for his role in strengthening Christianity in Ireland. But his first introduction to Ireland was involuntary when, at the age of 16, he was kidnapped from his home in Roman Britain and taken to Ireland as a slave. Patrick spent 6 years in menial occupations, mainly working as a herdsman. It was during these years of slavery and solitude that Patrick pledged his life to God.

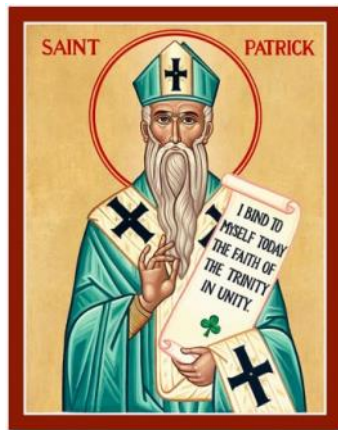
Patrick remained strong in his Christian faith, praying he would someday return to his homeland. He finally found his opportunity to escape when he heard a voice in his dream telling him that his ship was ready. He traveled 3 days by ship and 28 more days by land before reaching his home.

After studying for the priesthood in Gaul, he had another dream in which voices of those who had kidnapped him cried out for him to return to Ireland. Thus, in 432, now a bishop, Patrick returned to Ireland.

Sometime near the end of his life, Saint Patrick wrote in Latin two letters that contain almost all the factual information that exists about his life. In his "*Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus*," Saint Patrick excommunicates a British king named Coroticus who had killed Christian converts in Ireland and had taken other Christians from Ireland into slavery in England. Without consulting British bishops, Saint Patrick called upon all people in England to shun the criminal named Coroticus who had so egregiously sinned against God.

In his second letter, traditionally called his *Confession*, Saint Patrick describes his life as a youth, his six years as a slave in Ireland, his escape from slavery, his return to his parents' house in Britain, and his years of service as a missionary in Ireland.

While Patrick is honored as the patron of Ireland, "It is well to remember that Patrick was the victim of Irish injustice before he became the symbol of Irish pride. His spiritual conquest of Ireland followed the prior victory of love over the anger and bitterness in his own heart." [From *Blessed Among Us*].



*Judy Pearson*