

*Did you know . . .*

## Important Irish Saints

Today, March 17 is the Feast of St. Patrick. Patrick, a native of Britain, played a significant role in the full Christianization of many in Ireland. But there were many other Irish saints who were important as well. Ireland, once known as the land of saints and scholars, had many saints who left their native country to bring Christ to the rest of Europe.

Some of the most well-known include St. Finnian of Clonard, the Twelve Apostles of Ireland, Brigid of Kildare, and Oliver Plunkett.

After St. Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland, other generations had to ensure it did not die out. St. Finnian was one of the most influential saints who helped foster Christianity in Ireland. Instructed in the faith by disciples of St. Patrick, he studied in Gaul at the monastic center established by St. Martin of Tours. He eventually returned to Ireland and founded an influential monastery at Clonard. His work there earned him the title “tutor of saints.”

The Twelve Apostles of Ireland (Twelve Apostles of Erin) were early Irish monastic monks of the 6th century who studied under St. Finnian. They were instrumental to the foundation of Christianity in the Emerald Isle.

St. Brigid of Kildare was the founder of the first monastery in Country Kildare, Ireland. She was born in 450 AD; her mother was a Christian slave and her father was a pagan chieftain. She, too, was a slave girl who worked as a dairy maid. She became known for her virtuous life and charity to the poor. A Christian king, noting her special graces, convinced her father to grant Brigid her freedom. Once free, she refused marriage and consecrated herself to Christ and became Ireland’s first nun. She even converted her father to the faith after he witnessed her fashioning the sign of the cross from strands of rushes (Brigid’s Cross). It was St. Patrick who inspired her to become a Catholic and with him she is a Patron of Ireland.

Oliver Plunkett was the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland. He was the last victim of the Popish Plot, which caused anti-Catholic hysteria. He was arrested in 1679, falsely charged with treason and hanged in 1681. Before his death, he publicly forgave all those responsible. On Oct. 12, 1975, he was canonized. He is the Patron of Peace and Reconciliation in Ireland.

Ireland is home to over 300 canonized saints. [On St. Patrick's Day](#), let us honor them and pray for Ireland and the Irish people.

**Judy Pearson**

