

**ST. PATRICK'S DAY MASS**  
**FOR THE NEWTOWN ASSOCIATION**  
**ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK**  
**FRIDAY 17 MARCH 2017**

One of the oldest human rituals, whether religious or political, is the gathering together of people to make a procession and in so doing make a public demonstration of politics, tradition or religious practice. The members of the Newtown Association have just done that as they processed as a body from the Newtown Memorial Garden in Cardiff commemorating the contribution of Irish people to the building of Cardiff one hundred and fifty years ago and in the years since then. They have come to St. David's Cathedral and at the end of this Mass in celebration of St. Patrick, they will cross to another garden. This is the Sensory Garden at our new foundation in the Cornerstone across the road. That garden has been created for those who are blind and depend so much on their sense of hearing and touch and smell.

It is no accident that the Bible begins in a garden, the Garden of Eden, and the gospels finish in the Garden of the Resurrection. When Mary of Magdala encountered the risen Christ we are told "*...she supposed him to be the gardener*". Mass migration is the price to be paid when harvests fail, and the fertile gardens can no longer sustain the population. We see that in the famine that is sweeping East Africa and in the Syrian refugee crisis amongst other tragedies. It was also the experience of our Irish forebears in 1840 when the famine

drove them from their native land to try to find survival and work not least here in Cardiff.

When I visit the iron works at the Big Pit near Pontypool and see the size of the furnaces and realise that the ground those Irish people had to walk on was hot because of the underground pipes, I wonder if they thought they were living in hell when they thought about the rural world they had been forced to leave. The same must have been true of those who came here to Cardiff to work in the docks and on the railways connecting the coalmines of the valleys to the developing city of Cardiff and to the rest of the world.

Patrick himself must have thought he was in hell when he was taken off into slavery by pirates, exiled from his own country, exiled even from the faith of his father, who was a deacon of the Celtic Church. For whatever reason, as a young man he had no faith. In his 'Confessions' he tells of his conversion experience. He wrote *"on one occasion I saw a person praying in me. I heard him over me, that is, over the inner man. He spoke in the end and said he was the Spirit"*.

In these pre-Brexit days, it is good to know that Patrick went to a monastery near Auxerre in Roman France where he stayed for fifteen years. The fact that it was in the Chablis wine district may have had something to do with the length of his stay! He was ordained a bishop by St. Germanus of Auxerre in 432 and went back to Ireland to fight against the heresy of Pelagianism. The priest Pelagius taught that humanity was not affected by the original Sin of Adam and Eve. So there was no need for the atonement and

redemption won by Jesus on the cross. That led to a denial of the divinity of Jesus. And we all know Patrick's teaching on the Trinity. Not a romantic use of the shamrock, but a profound affirmation of the Three in One.

Like all of us, Patrick had his troubles even after his conversion. Listen to these two sentences from his Confessions:

*"Satan tempted me with a violence which I will remember as long as I am in this body. There fell on me what seemed like a great rock, and I could not stir a limb. I cried out to the prophet Elijah at the top of my voice, and it lifted my depression at once".* He suffered from broken confidences of people whom he had trusted: *"After thirty years they discovered against me a confession I had made before I became a deacon. In the anxiety of my troubled mind, I had confided to my dearest friend what I had done wrong. The night following my condemnation, I had a vision. I was confronted by the manuscript which had dishonoured me and simultaneously I heard God's voice saying to me "We have seen with disapproval the face of the chosen one deprived of his good name".*

Why do I give those words of Patrick himself? To remind us that these patron saints have things to say to us and examples to give us as we try to make sense of the complexities of life and the changing circumstances in which we find ourselves personally as a society and as a church. I love the motto of the Carthusian order which says *"The cross stands still whilst the world turns"*. Patrick put this in his own way when he prayed:

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all who love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.