



15th Sunday of the Year 16 July 2023

Reflection – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Imagine a sower going out to sow” (Matthew 13)

A short while ago I went to the North of Ireland for a few days on pilgrimage. I had chosen the name Patrick at Confirmation, but hadn't visited places in the North associated with his mission to the people of Ireland. Even at the age of 11 the image of the great Missionary appealed to me; I took some pictures and recorded a short video on my iPhone with the idea of producing a vlog – a Burning Bush “special” on my return.

Weeks have passed and the upcoming Gospel with the Parable of the Sower has led me to recall the short visit in the context of a Reflection for the 15th Sunday of the Year; later it will be presented as a vlog with the title; “Imagine a Sower going out to sow”.

A place that appealed to me specially is the Hill of Slane, which offers views over rolling farmland to the Irish Sea at Drogheda and the Wicklow Mountains. Here, in 433, St Patrick lit the Pascal (Easter) Fire for the first time in Ireland, signalling the arrival of Christianity. In this he challenged the pagan Bealtine (*Beelden*) fire on the Hill of Tara, 15 Kilometers to the South, lit by the High King, Laoghaire (*Leery*), to celebrate the arrival of summer. The Hill of Tara was a cultic centre where people worshipped the Celtic God of the Sun, Lugh (*Loog*). King Laoghaire lit a sacred fire at the top of the Hill to honour the pagan Sun God, and it was left burning for a number of days. He prohibited any other fires that would be seen from Tara during the festival. Patrick was not intimidated; he bravely lit and blessed the Paschal fire and the Easter candle during the vigil service on Holy Saturday night. The fire was left burning and could be seen clearly from the Hill of Tara.

St Patrick made a defiant statement: Jesus is the Light of the World (Jn 8:12) and none other, not even Lugh, the pagan Sun God. Jesus is the light that enlightens everyone (Jn 1:9), the light shining in the midst of the darkness (Jn 1:5). On Easter Sunday, Jesus is the light rising in glory.

At one time, the King and the druids planned to have St Patrick killed, but Patrick was so convincing and persuasive, and the King was so impressed by his extraordinary devotion, that he allowed him to continue his missionary work in his Kingdom.

The Hill of Slane served for centuries as a monastery and religious school. When I visited, I was able to see the remnants of the monastery Chapel and Friary, as well as the tower, the college building, and the cemetery with many distinctive Celtic crosses. A statue of St Patrick is displayed prominently at the front of the ruins.

Stripping away the widespread secular activities surrounding St Patrick's Day celebrations, we discover a holy person and Saint who spent more than 30 years successfully proclaiming the Gospel message, the gift of faith to the people of Ireland. Recalling and recognising his life as God's chosen missionary is how to uncover the true spirit of St Patrick.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



Jesus said to his Apostles: “Behold I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves” (Mt 10:16). This was Patrick’s strategy throughout his ministry. He did not seek to change the culture of the people he wanted to convert; instead, he shrewdly and simply introduced Christianity in a way that made it take root and flourish in that pagan society; while the soil was fertile, sowing the good seed in this vast land was not without trial.

In 5th century Ireland the population lived in thousands of tribal communities or clans throughout the country. They were idol worshippers with many gods, like the Romans in the time of Christ. Patrick knew the language from his years as a slave, but convincing them to worship the one True God and embrace the Way, the Truth and the Life was challenging. It is especially interesting that while Patrick did not attack the culture of the people, he made no such exception for the Druid priests. Druids were an ancient Irish society, steeped in mystical beliefs, fostered by priests promoting human sacrifice. Legend holds that the shamrock was a sacred plant of the Druids and Patrick used it to explain the Trinity.

Historians estimate that during Patrick’s mission, thousands of people were baptised, some 300 bishops ordained and hundreds of Churches erected throughout Ireland.

Because of his zeal, passion for Christ and commitment to his missionary calling, an entire nation became Christian.

When I reflect on the Parable of the Sower in the Gospel for the 15th Sunday in the light of my pilgrimage to the place where St Patrick preached the Gospel, I am conscious that each of us is called to witness to Christ’s Kingdom; each of us is a Sower:

- foundational is striving to know and live our Faith (as Patrick spent time to know and understand it better)
- then our mission to sow the life of Jesus and his teaching in others should be based on love (like Patrick had for the people among whom he was enslaved and returned to them)
- and we have to be people of courage (like Patrick was in giving witness on the Hill of Slane lighting the Paschal fire for all to see).

St Patrick pray for us
on this Sunday when
we reflect on our calling
to be Sowers of the Seed
of God’s Word, Building His Kingdom

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