

Readings: *Jeremiah 1:4 – 9; Psalm 116 (117); Mark 16: 15 – 20.*

Patrick was born about the turn of the 4th/5th centuries – the time that the Roman armies were withdrawing from Britain. His home was somewhere in the north-west of Britain, perhaps near Carlisle. His father was a deacon and his grandfather a priest. When he was about sixteen he was captured by Irish pirates, and for six years was a slave, herding livestock in Ireland.

In his *Confessions* he writes that in his youth he *did not know the true God*, but during his exile he learned to pray, and came to regard his slavery as a time of grace. After six years he managed to escape, and, after a time of wandering, returned to his family.

He writes that he had a vision in which he was given a letter from Ireland. As he read it he heard the voices of the Irish: *Come, and from now on walk with us*. At first both Patrick and the elders of his Church doubted the wisdom of returning to Ireland, but he sold his property and undertook training for the priesthood – possibly including time in Gaul.

In about AD 435 he returned to Ireland – this time as a slave of Christ. He worked mostly in the North, setting up his see as bishop in Armagh, which was near the residence of the most powerful Irish king, and remains the primatial see of Ireland. He tells us that he travelled widely, and that *everywhere I travelled, amid many perils, even to remote places ... where no one had ever penetrated, to baptize, ordain clergy, or to confirm the people* his preaching led to many conversions, and to the decision of many young people to become monks and virgins.

He was often in danger and was once imprisoned and even condemned to death. He also had to face both criticism from British bishops for the way he conducted his ministry, and attacks from a British ruler, seeking to make slaves of some new Christians. But through all this he rejoiced, writing *I am very much in debt to God who gave me so much grace that through me many people were born again in God and afterwards confirmed, and that clergy were ordained for them everywhere. All this was for a people newly come to belief, whom the Lord took from the very ends of the earth..... I wish to wait there for the promise of one who never breaks his word.*

Patrick died on 17th March, sometime in the second half of the fifth century. Tradition claims that he was buried in Downpatrick. Some secondary relics are in the National Museum in Dublin.