

It struck me as we celebrated St. Patrick's Day this past week that if Saint Patrick were alive today and came to the United States, instead of throwing him a parade we would more likely to throw him into prison.

For those who are not familiar with St. Patrick, he lived during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. He was kidnapped from his home in Britain and was held captive in Ireland. Eventually, he escaped and returned home. However, in a dream he felt God was calling him to return to Ireland under the auspices of the church and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to those Druids and pagans of Ireland. He was so diligent and faithful that he is credited with converting nearly all of Ireland to Christianity.

Thomas Cahill says of St. Patrick, "Patrick was so certain that he had been specifically called by God to do exactly what he did—return to the land of his captivity and convert the barbarians to Christianity—that his *Confession* leaves even the modern reader little room for doubt. The Patrick who came back to Ireland with the gospel was a real tough guy. He couldn't have been anything else—only a very tough man could have hoped to survive those people. I don't mean to say he wasn't a saint—he was a great saint—but he was a very rough, vigorous man."

What? A tough guy who thought the people of Ireland were barbarians? Someone who wanted to convert people to faith in Jesus Christ? Why wouldn't he just leave them alone to believe whatever they wanted to believe? How insensitive! How politically incorrect! What was his problem?

Indeed, it is unlikely that if St. Patrick came to the United States today that his views and perspectives would be tolerated. The desire of going to a foreign land with the intent of changing the religious beliefs of that people to faith in Jesus Christ would likely be considered cruel or uncaring. To call a people barbarian might be considered a hate crime and a lawsuit might be filed against St. Pat. Instead of being applauded for his efforts and having sainthood bestowed upon him, he would find great opposition to his plans.

Why is this the case? Our country is in the process of a religious conversion; a conversion from a Christian-based society to a secular humanist (if not atheistic) society. The truths of Christianity are regularly scoffed at in institutions of "higher" education. The idea that any one religion could be more true than others is thought to be ridiculous. The idea that it is a good thing to convert someone from their own beliefs to belief in Christ is rejected.

As a result, we live in a country where some students can no longer pledge allegiance to the flag because the pledge includes the words "under God". We live in a culture where anyone who would dare say the Christianity is the only true religion may be ostracized as a hate-monger. St. Patrick just would not fit in. Before he got 100 words out of his mouth someone would try to have him arrested for disturbing the peace because the truths of Christianity which are considered passé today are exactly those truths that St. Patrick brought to Ireland.

Ironically, it is the Christian Spirit which St. Patrick knew that is needed in our day if our country is going to get back on track. If Jesus Christ was indeed crucified and raised from the dead – if this is not fable, but fact – then Christianity is based upon a miracle with which no other religion can compare. If Jesus Christ is both God and man who died on the cross and is the only person who could save humanity from their sins, then there is salvation in none other. To believe in these things is good, not bad.

Despite the fact that St. Patrick rejected the cultural and religious beliefs that were in Ireland when he arrived in Ireland, life in Ireland improved greatly as a result of his witness. This was because he was proclaiming the truth that there was salvation only through Jesus Christ and people turned their lives over to Christ and lived their lives following Christ's teaching and example.

The message that converted and blessed Ireland is a message that we need today. May God raise up faithful Christians in our day with the toughness and conviction of Saint Patrick to spare our own country from the ways of error and sin and lead us to righteousness, peace, and truth.