

Saint Patrick

March 17

(c. 385–461)

Why are so many people wearing green today? You see shamrocks, parades, and parties to celebrate Saint Patrick. What do you know about him?

Patrick was the son of a Roman military officer stationed in Britain. Patrick grew up more interested in a career than in religion. At the age of 16, however, he was captured by Irish pirates and taken to Ireland. For six years he was put to work tending sheep. He suffered from cold and lack of food. Even more than these physical pains, Patrick suffered the loss of his family and freedom. All alone among the hills, he finally turned to God—his only hope as he looked for a way to return home. Eventually he escaped on a ship bound for Britain, paying his way by taking care of stolen dogs the crew planned to sell. His family was delighted when he returned home—but they were surprised to find a new Patrick. He now had a goal and a vision to serve God. Patrick began studying to become a priest.

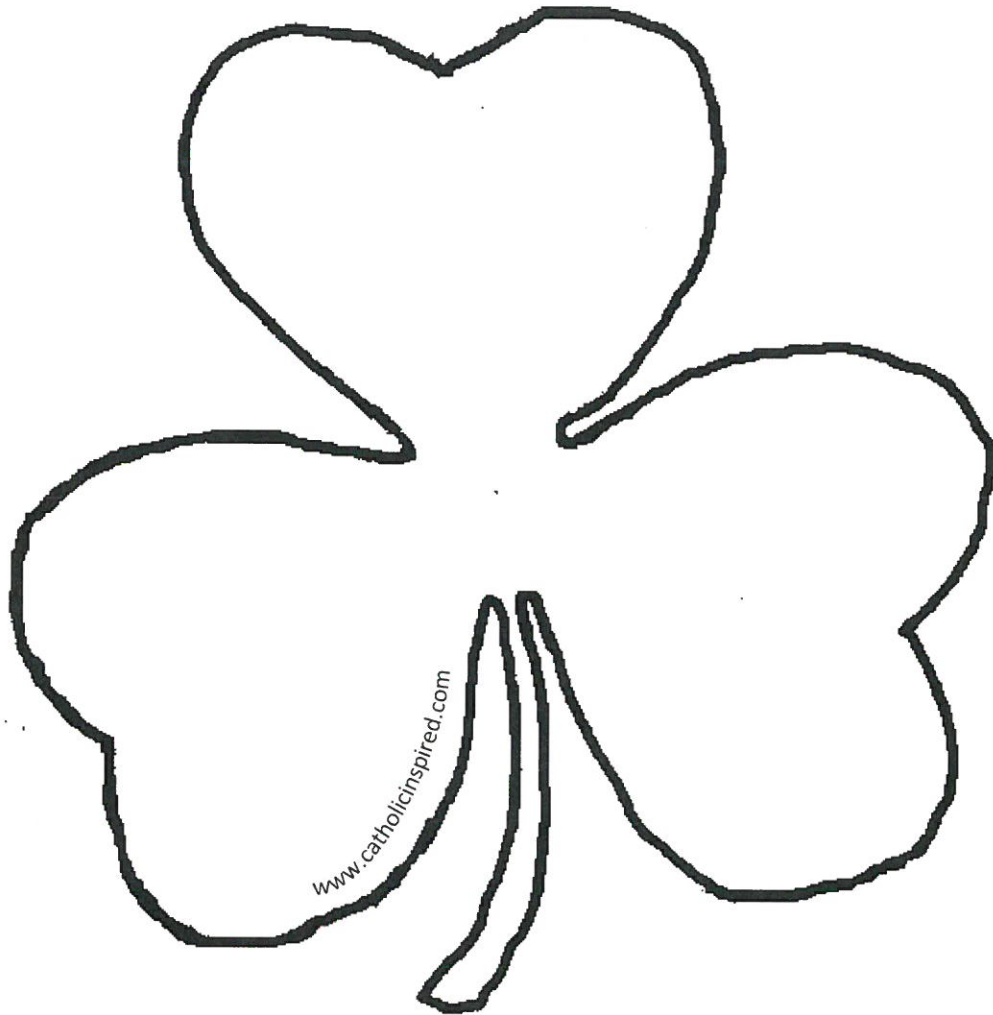
When the Church called for missionaries to go to Ireland to teach the Christian faith, Patrick wanted to go, but he remembered his years of slavery. Then in a dream he heard the Irish people calling to him, “We beg you come and walk with us again.” Now Church officials had to decide whether to send Patrick, for he was not well educated. However, Pope Celestine I saw in him the extraordinary qualities of a missionary. Patrick understood the people of Ireland because he had lived among them. He knew their

language and already had spent 15 years in parish ministry. Most of all, Patrick believed in his vocation. At the age of 42, Patrick was ordained a bishop, and the pope sent him and several helpers to northern and western Ireland, where the Gospel had never been preached.

The people of Ireland lived in tribes and clans and worshipped pagan gods. Druids, who were like magicians or wizards, kept the people away from any other religion. Patrick knew he would have to convert the chief of a clan before he could win the people. Patrick courageously started with the most powerful clan at Tara. Immediately the chief respected Patrick, who was the son of a military official, who spoke the chief’s language well, and who explained his beliefs with sincerity. The chief was converted, and Christianity began to take root in Ireland. Patrick often faced danger, for the Druids plotted to do away with him. But Patrick continued to preach the faith, ready for death at any time. He always remembered that he had been a slave, so he showed compassion for all classes of people. He set up monasteries and convents, established parishes, adapted Irish celebrations to Christian feasts, and worked to abolish paganism.

Patrick was a model missionary, and his methods of evangelization can be a guide for missionaries today. He helped the people of Ireland keep their beautiful history and culture and add to their heritage the richness of Christianity. Today Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, but his feast is a worldwide day of celebration.

The Trinity is like a Shamrock!



Color the shamrock. Then cut out all the parts below.

Glue **God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit**, one on each leaf.

For extra fun, tape/glue a real clover into the middle or add glitter!

