

Your Excellency Bishop Angell, Fr. McCarthy Pastor of this venerable and historic Parish, brother priests, sisters, friends...

One Sunday morning in August 1965 I boarded a plane in Dublin to begin my first and easily most difficult journey to America. It was a beautiful day -sun shining, not a cloud in the sky- and as we flew across the land to Shannon, somehow Ireland took on a whole new meaning for me.

I had belonged. I was part of it. It was in my blood. And now, even though something new was happening in my life, something was also coming to an end. Something was dying.

As I looked out the window at the hills and the lakes and the winding roads, I saw a little volkswagon down there just plodding along, and I distinctly remember saying to myself "God, if only I could be in that little Volkswagon instead of this big plane."

Well, I've been back several times in body, and many more times in spirit! The Good Book says there's a time for everything. Around the middle of March every year is the time when it is appropriate and proper for us all to go back. It's the time for us all to rhapsodize about our beginnings, to toast our roots, and rejoice in where we've come from.

Like Peter in the Gospel, we can say this morning "Lord, it is good for us to be here". In fact, it would be almost wrong if we were anywhere else or doing anything else.

There's a little story told about four men of different nationalities who were shooting the breeze together one night in a pub. Over a few beers, they were tackling the immortal question "If you were not what you are, what would you be"?

The Frenchman said "If I weren't French, I'd rather be Italian".

The Spaniard said "If I wasn't Spanish, I'd like to be German".

The Englishman said "If I wasn't English, I'd be Austrian".

Then they turned to Casey and said, "Casey, if you weren't Irish, what would you be"? And Casey said "I'd be ashamed of myself".

So hello, Casey and McCarthy, O'Driscoll and OShea, Sullivan and Smith, and all the rest,-even Angell.

It is pride that brings us together. And the foundation and source of that pride is the saint of 1500 years ago, whose feast is still celebrated, and more important, whose message is still heeded.

The unfortunate thing about St. Patrick is that he has been encased so much in story and tale and legend, that today solid facts about him are almost as misty and foggy as the land itself.

But never lose sight of the astonishing truth that in his own lifetime, he transformed a whole nation; he converted a whole country to Christianity; in his own lifetime he replaced the pagan fires of spring with the Paschal Fire of Easter.

Much has been written recently about unemployment in Ireland -18 or 19 percent. Young people are leaving. It's very sad, and it certainly shouldn't be taken lightly. The future of any country is in its youth.

But emigration from Ireland didn't begin today or yesterday. It has a long history. I sometimes think that the Irish, like the Israelites, were destined to be wanderers. There's an old poem that puts it well. It goes

"Although you're many miles from where the shamrocks grow  
You'll find an Irishman, no matter where you go."

From Sydney to Singapore, from Chicago to Crackow, from Auckland to Oakland, you'll find them. And you'll find them in Rhode Island, - in Newport and Middletown and Portsmouth. Following the great famine, they came <sup>here</sup> in the mid and late 1800's, not in the grandeur of Tall Ships or America's Cup Yachts, but in the vessels of agony and poverty and rejection.

And they brought with them nothing, - nothing but themselves, and the traditions and values and faith of their homeland. They brought with them a spiritual strength which knew no limits, a spiritual strength which gave them identity, a spiritual strength that helped them overcome the bigotry, the racism, and the sign... the infamous sign "No Irish need apply".

So today, when an Irishman laughs, it's an olympian laugh, because it was born out of pain and hardship and persecution.

When an Irishman sympathizes with the plight of the Polish, he does so with a genuine understanding nod, because he was there.

When an Irishman celebrates an Easter Resurrection, he does so with true Christian rejoicing because he has also lived and known Good Friday.

Now of course, there's another side to our reputation!

They say we're thick headed, a little too fond of 'the drop', even of being jealous and envious of one another. Someone once said that the only time the Irish stand together is for the gospel at Mass.

Well, I don't agree. But who's perfect anyway? That only comes with eternity.

We are though, given to exxageration. We love to make things bigger than they are. It makes life more interesting and imaginative. So if 50 were there, we say there hundreds present. If Pat catches a fish this size, he comes in and says " I caught a fish and it was THIS size".

An American was going around the Lakes of Killarney one time and he said to the boatman "Are the lakes deep"? "Deep" says he, "I have a nephew who dove in there six months ago and we got a postcard from him in Australia last week".

Exxageration and blarney are all part of the style that make the Irish clever conversationalists, quick with words, people of vision, lovers of life.

Fellow Irishmen and women, we have a remarkable heritage that today we celebrate in memory.

Remember St.Patrick

Remember your homeland, or the land of your origin

Remember your culture and faith and standards of life passed on by blood, sweat and tears.

But remember too that you can't live in the past. You can't live in a <sup>what's your</sup> ~~memory~~ any more than you can drive your car through your rear view mirror. You are now the ambassadors, the living witnesses, of that faith of St.Patrick.

Pope John Paul, after two unbelievably happy days in Ireland in 1979, bade a tearful farewell at Shannon Airport. He spoke to the thousands of Irish present, and to the millions all over the world, with his parting words. And his parting words were

Ireland, semper fidelis, always faithful

Ireland, always faithful.

I opened these remarks on a personal note, so I'll close in like manner. After 22 years in Rhode Island, I feel it is such a privelege to be part of that huge, great, boundaryless Irish family. I have no need any more to be in that little volkswagon. I feel priveleged and proud to be one of you.

Beannacht De is Padraig oraibh. May God and Patrick bless you.