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3-17-2023

St. Patrick's Day

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Abstract

"In some cities, there are parades, festivals, and pub crawls; the city of Chicago even dyes the Chicago River green to commemorate the holiday."

Posting about St. Patrick's Day traditions from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/st-patricks-day/>

Keywords

In All Things, Saint Patrick's Day, Irish, traditions

Disciplines

Christianity

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March 17, 2023

Celebrations, holidays, traditions. Many memories attach themselves to special moments outside the daily rhythms of ordinary life. Often connected with food, smells, stories, and participation, how and what do you pause to celebrate? Maybe some of these “Unsung Holidays” will inspire you to gather people, create a new memory, and celebrate a beauty within God’s world.

Growing up, I know about my Irish heritage, but I didn’t feel particularly connected to Ireland. The only day I felt Irish was on St. Patrick’s Day. When March 17 rolled around, my mother made corned beef and cabbage, and my sisters and I dressed in green to keep those with pinching fingers at bay. It was fun, a nice way to break up the rainy dreariness of March in St. Louis.

What I didn’t know at the time was that St. Patrick was a real person—a fifth century missionary, in fact, who felt called to Ireland to convert the Irish to Catholicism. According to tradition, St. Patrick was kidnapped by pirates when he was a teenager and sent to Ireland as a slave before escaping home to Britain. He later became a cleric (a priest or religious leader) and chose to return to Ireland, where he baptized thousands of people and was said to have confronted the Druids, priests of ancient Celtic paganism.

One of the well-known legends about St. Patrick is how he used a shamrock, a three-leafed clover, to explain the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The clover includes three leaves but is one part – similar to God in three persons.

After St. Patrick passed away, he was named the patron saint of Ireland and the namesake of his own holiday.

Although some people go to church on St. Patrick’s Day, the holiday is mostly known for drinking, debauchery, and bad Irish stereotypes. For those who celebrate Lent, St. Patrick’s Day is a day off, which makes it a great time to imbibe. In some cities, there are parades, festivals, and pub crawls; the city of Chicago even dyes the Chicago River green to commemorate the holiday.

When I think of St. Patrick's Day, I don't think of day drinking or "kiss me, I'm Irish" T-shirts. I think of my beloved great-grandmother, Rosemary Ellis, who had a quick wit and a strong mind well into her 90s. I think of her grandparents and their decision to leave Ireland behind and come to the United States.

Sometimes as a teenager when I didn't feel like participating in St. Patrick's Day, I'd say, "I don't need to wear green because my eyes are green!" This St. Patrick's Day, though, I plan to wear green. I'll try out a baked corn beef recipe with roasted potatoes and purple cabbage. I'll pull out some old family photos to look through. Maybe my toddler son and I will draw three-leafed clovers and talk about what the clover symbolizes.

Not your typical way of remembering St. Patrick's Day, but for me, it's a great way to reflect on my family's history, enjoy a hearty meal, and pray that spring greenery will finally make its way to snowy Iowa.