

St. Patrick was kidnapped from Britain at the age of 16 and carried off to Ireland into slavery. Life in the fifth century was rugged for everyone, but worse for foreign slaves. In the years that Patrick tended herds on the slopes of Ireland, he endured poverty, alienation, and the brutal elements of nature. His strength came from his prayer. Eventually he fled back to Britain in a daring escape on the sea, but he then returned to Ireland with another purpose, to preach the gospel. Patrick accepted inconvenience and even personal harm, yet returned in love to help the perpetrators of the crimes against him. He is a model of sacrifice. Most people in this country think of Patrick as the reason for parades and green beer, but Patrick is a model of simplicity, poverty, solitude, forgiveness, evangelization, and charity.

As we begin our annual appeal this weekend, I ask you for a sacrifice. I pray that God will share with you some of the Spirit that Patrick received. When we all share our resources with our community, all of us benefit from the grace of our parish church.

To contribute to charity is to make a statement of faith. It says that you believe God gave you what you have, that you have a responsibility to support those who spread God's word, and that God will take care of you if you give some of your fortune away. Contributing is an act of faith. Like Peter walking on the water, we will not falter if we keep our eyes fixed on Christ.

People find it easier to give once they believe this way. We realize that we do not own the things we have. God is the owner of everything, but God has entrusted us with these resources like stewards, and we are to put these things to work for God's sake, not ours. In giving, we share what God owns so others can benefit as well. It's easy to give when giving is an act of love.

You have always been generous, and I thank you for that. The weekly envelope sustains the many programs you love and use so well -- our school, religious education, our sister community in El Salvador, the Church Community Organization, trained ministers, and gifted, responsible musicians.

Our needs at St. Regis this year are very basic. Expenses are going up, like salaries and utilities. We'd like to devote more to youth ministry. Many projects have gone undone for too long, including repairs on equipment and facilities.

Our diocese recommends 5% of income to the parish church. Many of you have told me how happy you are to give that amount. Some give more. Others find it too difficult to accomplish. But 5% is our recommended goal for everyone. Your pledge card should arrive in the mail soon. If it doesn't, please let us know. I'm asking you to increase your gift on pledge weekend in two weeks. I'm also asking you to give with the right attitude: not begrudgingly, but in love. We need your support. We also need the support of our youth. Many of our young people hold jobs and pay taxes, but have not yet used envelopes to support our church. When we all sacrifice together we forge more strongly the bonds of our love.

Maybe St. Patrick could have found happiness by spending his

energy on parades and green beer. Instead, he chose to sacrifice everything for the sake of the gospel. When we sacrifice we proclaim that gospel to the world.