



2nd Week of Lent and Feast of St Patrick 16 & 17 March 2025

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Knowing an end to gloom and darkness” (words taken from the Exultet)

Two years ago I visited places associated with St Patrick and his mission to the people of Ireland. One I recall most vividly is the Hill of Slane: this is where Patrick lit the Paschal fire on the Eve of Easter 432. At the time the High King was lighting a fire at Tara (about 15km away) to honour the Druids. Patrick's fire could be seen from Tara and was a direct challenge to the pagan way of life being promoted by the High Kings of his day. Patrick was hauled in to explain himself, and so impressed King Laoghaire that, though he didn't become a Christian himself, he allowed Patrick to preach to the people. It is there that the story of Patrick's use of the shamrock to explain the Trinity had its origins. It was with the lighting of that Paschal Fire at Easter that Christianity came to birth in Ireland though there had been missionaries earlier; an event that will be celebrated all over the world on Monday 17 March. In my present mission with ethnic communities I came to realise that St Patrick is Patron Saint of Nigeria: these days we owe much to the church in Nigeria for priests and sisters to support us in the Faith of St Patrick here in the UK and not least in Ireland itself.

The Paschal Fire that is lit on the Eve of Easter is one of the great symbols of Christ the Light of the World whose Resurrection is celebrated with the lighting of the Fire and the Paschal Candle and proclaimed in the wonderful song the Exultet where we celebrate *“knowing an end to gloom and darkness.”* As the Celebrant lights the Paschal Candle from the new fire he prays:

“May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.”

On the eve of St Patrick's Day this year, the Second Sunday of Lent (Year C Readings), we have the account of the Transfiguration of Our Lord from St Luke's Gospel. The Transfiguration occurs on a mountain (as does Patrick's lighting of the Paschal Fire); Mount Tabor, and on it we see (cf. Loyola Press) *“an anticipation of the glory of Jesus' Resurrection.... Not until they also witness his Passion and death will the disciples understand Jesus' Transfiguration. We hear this story of Jesus' Transfiguration early in Lent, but we have the benefit of hindsight. In our hearing of it, we anticipate Jesus' Resurrection even as we prepare to remember Jesus' Passion and death.”* My mind turned to Mount Tabor where the Transfiguration took place, and my visit there some years ago. It is also traditionally believed to be where Moses saw the Promised Land before he died. And, preparing for our weekly vlog, 'Burning Bush', we found the best depiction of the Transfiguration is part of a mosaic in Constantinople style kept in the Monastery of

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Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



St Catherine at the foot of Mount Sinai, reputed to be the location of the Burning Bush where Moses heard God speak to him.

Fr Ferlita in his commentary on the readings for the 2nd Sunday of Lent writes:

“The entire journey of the People of God, a journey that began with Abraham (recalled in the 1st reading from Genesis for the 2nd Sunday) passes into Jesus and through him into God. We take up that journey in Jesus and with him and through him. As St Paul saysin the second reading ... he will change (that is Transfiguration) our lonely body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him to bring all things into subjection to himself (Philippians 3:21).”

He concludes: *“What better time, what better place, than the celebration of the Eucharist to consecrate the movement and direction of our lives and the world around us, for the Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ’s death and resurrection. To eat this bread and to drink this cup is to be strengthened for the journey. It is to be joined to Christ transfigured, to Christ risen, who leads us through time and death to the mountaintop of his glory.”*

Donald Attwater in his brief account of St Patrick’s life concludes:

“What stands out.....is St Patrick’s sense of being called by God to the work he had undertaken, and his determination and modesty in carrying it out”. Attwater recalls Patrick’s own words “I owe it to God’s grace that so many people should through me be born again to him.”

His missionary zeal inspired me to take his name at Confirmation; may we all be renewed in our Faith in the Risen Lord as we celebrate the Paschal Mystery with lighting of the new Fire and the lighting of the Paschal Candle this Easter.

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