

St. Patrick

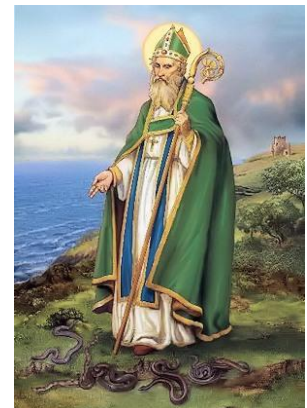
[Saint Patrick](#), who lived during the fifth century, is the patron saint of Ireland and its national apostle. Born in Roman Britain, he was kidnapped and [brought to Ireland as a slave](#) at 16. He later escaped, but returned to Ireland and was credited with bringing [Christianity](#) to its people.

In the centuries following Patrick's death (believed to have been on March 17, 461), the mythology surrounding his life became ever more ingrained in the Irish culture: Perhaps the most well-known [legend of St. Patrick](#) is that he explained the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) using the three leaves of a native Irish clover, the shamrock.



St. Patrick

On March 17 the Church honors St. Patrick, who in the fifth century came to Ireland as a missionary and converted all the country a span of thirty-three years. He changed Ireland forever. Not only did St. Patrick convert Ireland, his influence was universal. With his work, religious orders and monasteries were established and spread. These orders preserved the Faith during the period often referred to as the "Dark



Ages." And his work continues for many centuries. As the Irish emigrated, they took their Faith with them all over the world. In the eyes of the Church his sanctity isn't about the marvelous accomplishments of his life, but the actual living his Catholic faith. He was saintly. In other words, he lived the Gospel and loved Christ above all things. And that is what makes his life exemplary.

Unfortunately, especially in the United States, March 17 now is mainly equated with all things Irish and green. It is understandable that honoring this saint would remind an Irishman of his heritage. The transition from the motherland to the United States was difficult and full of persecution, and there should be a day to unite the Irish worldwide. Somewhere along the line there is a disconnect from the Catholic feast day honoring St. Patrick, but I won't belabor that obvious point.

If one lived in Ireland, St. Patrick's day is a solemnity, the highest rank of a feast day. Although it might be a bitter pill to swallow for many Irish, in the United States St. Patrick's Day is the lowest rank: an optional memorial. (But the Church recognizes that when St. Patrick is a local patron, such as the name of the church, cathedral, patron of a diocese, etc., the ranking goes higher.) From the [Universal Norms of the Liturgical Year and Calendar](#):

The Saints who have universal importance are celebrated in an obligatory way throughout the whole Church; other Saints are either inscribed in the calendar, but for optional celebration, or are left to be honored by a particular Church, or nation, or religious family.⁵

Celebrations, according to the importance assigned to them, are hence distinguished one from another and termed: Solemnity, Feast, Memorial....

Memorials are either obligatory or optional; their observance is integrated into the celebration of the occurring weekday in accordance with the norms set forth in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and of the Liturgy of the Hours.

Obligatory Memorials which fall on weekdays of Lent may only be celebrated as Optional Memorials.

And during Lent, even if the priest were celebrating the optional memorial for a saint, the vestments remain violet. In St. Patrick's case because he is a bishop and not a martyr, in Ireland and other countries where it is celebrated as a solemnity, the vestments would be white. St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City would celebrate a solemnity "of the title of one's own church" and could wear white vestments. But note that the liturgical color for St. Patrick is NEVER green.

If March 17 falls on a Friday, an optional memorial still requires abstinence from meat, which is a solemn obligation of all Catholics from the age of fourteen. This would explain why when St. Patrick's Day falls on a Friday the corned beef and bangers are off the menu. Only the bishop can give dispensation to the abstinence rule.

