

St. Patrick' Day
Celebration of the Eucharist
March 17, 1990
Plymouth Congregational Church
Most Reverend Thomas J. Murphy
Coadjutor Archbishop of Seattle
Homily

One of the great gifts we have as human beings is the gift of speech, the gift of being able to share thoughts, dreams, and hopes with others. To communicate with others what is within our mind and heart can bring forth the best of what it means to be a human being.

What is truly mind-bogling is the realization that God would also use words to speak with us. The ultimate gift from God was to speak the powerful Word which we call Jesus and to share that Word made flesh with us. It would be through Jesus that God would share His Word with us.

But God would also challenge us as human beings to speak His Word, to proclaim that Word, to live that Word to the fullest! God's Word would be the core values within the human heart - the values of peace, love, justice. Centuries ago, God would tell Isaiah that His Word would be placed within the prophet's heart. In the early Christian community, the first followers of Jesus were delighted to hear God's Word and the challenge to become a "light to the nations." And wherever we would speak God's Word, we are told by Jesus to begin by saying to those around us: "Peace be with you and to all within this house."

Why do I use words this morning to share with you the powerful challenge of the Word of God? I do so because we gather here today to celebrate the life and ministry of a person whose words have made a difference in the lives of so many of us gathered here. We are people with a strange and unique gift called an Irish heritage. We are people of laughter and tears, stories and faith. We recognize the Holy Spirit, and appreciate the other spirits available to us. St. Patrick becomes the lightning rod which reminds us who we are and what we must be - people who dare to speak God's Word today.

God's Word is planted in the human heart. It is the word of freedom which has become a powerful chorus spreading like wildfire through Eastern Europe. It is the word of martyrdom not only spoken but lived by people such as Archbishop Romero and those who suffer and die in Central America today. It is the word of hope which believes that people and nations can survive without dependence on a military budget. It is the word of life which appreciates the dignity of each and every human being, from the unborn child to others who are homeless and poor among us. It is the word of wisdom spoken by the elderly in our society whose lives we must respect and appreciate.

But the special challenge for which we come together today is to speak the word of peace. It is the word of peace especially between people in Northern Ireland, as well as in all places where people take up arms against one another. Somehow or other, we dare to ask God to hear our prayers and to encourage people to bring an end to the divisions and hatred, the violence and bloodshed which stains the heart and soul of a nation.

And finally, for those of us who share an Irish heritage, it is essential that we say a word of thanks. I give thanks to my parents for their courage and faith to leave home and to find a new beginning in this strange land called America. I give thanks for their constant stories to me of a land and a people for whom faith is like one's breath, where laughter is contagious, where tears come from a river of hardship and suffering, but within it all, there is the presence of a good and gracious God.

I give thanks for hearing the stories of a rugged land known as the Kingdom of Kerry, where ocean waves hug the rocks, where mountain peaks try to touch their God, and where people struggle with the stony earth to yield a simple crop. Ireland is more than a nation. It is the soul of a people who yearn and dream and pray for peace.

I do not work for the Irish Tourist Bureau, but I do believe that St. Patrick's Day gives all of us an opportunity to hear God's Word and to dare to speak it. What better words can be found than the Prayer of St. Patrick:

Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ within me,
Christ below me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right hand,
Christ on my left hand,
Christ in my sleeping,
Christ in my waking,
Christ in the heart of all who think of me,
Christ in the mouth of all who speak to me,
Christ in every eye that looks at me,
Christ in every ear that listens to me.

And may that peace of Christ be yours! Happy St. Patrick's Day!