

**Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron**  
**St. Patrick's Day Homily**  
**Most Holy Trinity Church, Detroit**  
**March 17, 2009**

**(As transcribed from digital audio recording at liturgy)**

Bishop Flores, Father Kohler, my brother priests; distinguished religious brothers and sisters present; honored leaders of our civic community who do us great honor by your presence today; brothers and sisters all, especially all of you who are regular parishioners here at Holy Trinity:

To begin, as a kind of preface to my preaching, I want to say how much I appreciate your warm welcome Father Kohler. I am very grateful to be here on St. Patrick's Day. I appreciated the discretion of your remarks about the 175th anniversary. I have also always understood that part of the reason for the establishment of this congregation was that the Irish didn't feel welcome with the Francophone Catholics at St. Anne's, so I think it is a great gesture of reconciliation that you let Monsignor L'Archêveque Vigneron come to be at St. Patrick's Church today, Father. Thank you. And I also want to speak for the whole Archdiocese in saying that I hope that the terrible aftermath, the shock of the theft has died for you and the community, and you know we continue to stand with your parish in solidarity.

I am very grateful to all who have come here to be part of this sacred liturgy today, this offering of the holy sacrifice of the Mass, so that, together, we can glorify God, (if I have the shamrock, oh, here it is) Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Triune God whom St. Patrick preached and the God who worked so powerfully in the life of this man, who gave his all for his beloved Irish people. There are lots of ways that groups of people gather together today in order to mark St. Patrick's feast. There are parades; there are gatherings at family tables; there will be, from

time to time, a few groups of friends at public houses and social clubs today. And in all of these there is present a great sense of joy and a justifiable pride in the Irish heritage.

These gatherings occur on this date because the Irish culture identifies the life and work of the holy bishop Patrick as one of the principal sources for its very existence. It is because of the particular nature of the contribution of St. Patrick's life that the history of Ireland grew as it did. It is on that count that we are gathered here at Holy Trinity Church for this very particular sort of event. Friends, yes, gathered not for a parade, not for a family meal, but to celebrate the Holy Eucharist in this hour, to give thanks and praise to God for the gift God made to Ireland, and to the Irish culture and people through the grace of St. Patrick.

It is this point that I would like to spend some time considering with you in my preaching: Why, in addition to parades and meals and the pint shared with friends, it is right for us to keep this day by offering the Eucharist to God's glory in thanks for the life of Patrick. Let's start with a simple statement about what St. Patrick did – he loved the people of Ireland. He loved them more than life itself, and, out of that love, he devoted his whole life to sharing with the people of Ireland the very best thing he had – the good news that Christ loved them. He brought them the truth of the Gospel, the truth of Christ, about God and God's love for them; about the world and their place in it; about right and wrong, and how to accept from God the strength to do the one and avoid the other; about the dignity of every human being and the meaning of their lives and their deaths; and about the way the new life Jesus gives through his Death and Resurrection.

By God's grace, St. Patrick's preaching was astonishingly effective; it bore great fruit. He brought to the Irish soul, to the soul of that whole people, a grace from God, the Redeemer, which once rooted there, was a sort of catalyst to purify and carry to a new level of worth and

dignity all the native gifts which had been planted in the Irish heart by God the Creator. That is, by his work as the evangelist of Ireland, St. Patrick fathered a people and their culture, and here I have in mind everything we think of when we use the word “Irish” as a term of honor for another, of pride for ourselves. From that island nation, the people born from the unity of the Celtic heritage the Gospel truth has spread to every corner of the earth, and in their diaspora and their going out, they have blessed our nation, and all these nations, with the blessings that came to their first land through the work of St. Patrick.

You see then, I hope, why offering the sacrifice of the Mass has its own very rightful place in today’s observance alongside parades and meals, and shared glasses of cheer. We are here to thank God for the man Patrick, for what the Lord was able to accomplish through his ministry, for the blessing Patrick was to the Irish people, not only of his own day, but for all the generations thereafter. We offer this Eucharist to sing God's praises for what He has done for the Irish and for the world through the fruit borne from the Gospel seed Patrick planted on the little green island at the edge of the Atlantic. So, I am going to pause for a minute and let each of you think of what you want to thank God for today at Mass because you are Irish or because of the Irish (pause).

Now, while thanksgiving is the more important act of the heart required of us who are gathered here in Holy Trinity Church today, there is a second act no less necessary, I think. God's inviting us to make a commitment to imitate St. Patrick and to continue what he began in his life’s service as the evangelist of Ireland. Specifically, I come into the church today mindful that I am in our time as was St. Patrick in his, a steward of the Gospel vision for the world. And in my role as a bishop, I invite every one of you to renew your commitment to keep alive and to foster the great goods, the great fruits, the great truths, that are the great inheritance which the

Irish owe to their father, St. Patrick. For example, for so many of you that is fostering the truth, the good of family life; what a great gift. And isn't today a good day to treasure again what it means to be a family brought together by God? Perhaps it is the great good, the great virtue of loyalty so often exemplified in the history of the Irish.

Today would be a day to resolve ever-more to be loyal. Perhaps we might think about the great goods of art and poetry, how the Irish have always been blessed with a sense that the ordinary is charged with the super ordinary, and have been able to speak about that eloquently. The Irish have a great sense of intrepid devotion and solidarity for any cause that merits their investment. This has, in the lives of so many Irish – Irish-Americans – translated into public service, a commitment to see that the order of the laws and our institutions are fair, especially protecting the weakest and the most vulnerable. A good way to worship God I believe on St. Patrick's Day is to be renewed in that commitment – commitment which so often blossomed in the hearts of daughters and sons of Ireland.

If I might suggest one thing in particular as a resolution for everybody here today, I would like to ask that you embrace once again a very particular good that is so central to the culture of Ireland, the Christian culture of Ireland, a good that enjoyed a central role in Irish life and culture... education. In the generations after St. Patrick's mission, Ireland became known as the Island of Saints and Scholars. In your loyalty to the Irish heritage, I ask you, please, to exert yourself tirelessly to improve our schools. To promise today to do this work will be a great way to honor St. Patrick and the heritage that traces itself back to him. Somebody said that it is at this point that you are going to expect me to tell you I have a plan. I don't have a plan, honestly. I am simply here to say how important this is to our world today and that if anybody understands how important this is, I am sure it is the Irish, and let's build on that heritage for the future.

I am very grateful to be the principal priest at this Eucharist, to lead you in these acts of praise and thanksgiving, and I especially thank God that He, who began this good work in the Irish through St. Patrick, will bring it to completion through you, whether you are Michael or Moira, Bridget or Liam, or even Nacio, Julio, or Guadalupe today. God bless you. Happy St. Patrick's.