

To the fabulous young people of the Diocese of Olympia gathered at Black Diamond for HYC:

I write this to you at about 32,000 feet. Unfortunately, that is where I spend a lot of my time as a Bishop. Denise and Valerie and Sister D have been diligent in attempting to get me to you. However, this past week has been the Spring House of Bishops meeting in North Carolina, and I had to make my way back to Atlanta first before making my way to Seattle. Tomorrow I have to be on Whidbey Island to celebrate St. Patrick's day with them, and so that means a 6 a.m. start for me. When I land it will already be 9 pm in my body, if we land on time, which is not at all clear at this point! But enough of that. I can't be there in body as I had hoped, but I am always with you in Spirit.

Still, I wanted to tell you a bit about my thoughts on Patrick, who I know you have been studying a bit about so far at HYC. Patrick, as you will know by now, is the patron saint of Ireland. Having learned this year that I am mostly Irish, it now means more to me too! Patrick is perhaps one of the most revered saints of them all. Across the world St. Patrick's day is rarely missed.

I may be telling you something you already learned, but I will do it just the same. Patrick left his home, Britain, at a very early age, younger than some of you who are in the room tonight. He became a slave in what is now Ireland, which was not his homeland, but rather a foreign place, called pagan even during that time. He did rather hard labor for almost 6 years or more. And all of that time dreamed of his escape and finding his way home. He finally did escape after a dream he had in which he heard, "your ship awaits". So when he escaped he fled toward the ocean and he begged a captain to let him on his ship, which he finally did. When he arrived in Britain it was a hard slog back to his home. Although he was glad to be home and they glad to see him, there is a lot in his writings about the fact that he was not so warmly welcomed. Apparently he had been in a quarrel when he left, most think about some accused financial impropriety on his part. Even after 6 years, there was little room for forgiveness and so Patrick's homecoming was less than what he had dreamt about. So, Patrick did an amazing thing, he went back to the land and the people that had enslaved him.

Just imagine that, perhaps you could think about the darkest, perhaps scariest place you have ever visited, and what it would be like if God said to you, go back there, and live there, and do your work and ministry there. But that is what Patrick did. What is important for us in Patrick, for this day and time, is to even in the smallest way, garner some of his deep faith that Jesus was walking with him at every step. The concept of the Holy Spirit, for Patrick, was not a concept, but a living, breathing, everyday reality. He took no steps without Jesus and he felt him there with him at all times. Further, the more we read and know of Patrick, he was a servant to the people, the very people who had once enslaved him. In some ways, he went back to servitude, indentured status, this time with the Lord as his master, and with the people of Ireland as his beloved charges. Not only did he go back and serve those who had enslaved him, he brought his faith, by living as Christ, and by carrying the Holy Spirit close to him always. And through all of this he learned to love these people, so deeply, that to this day he is honored so deeply by the Irish.

It is in those darkest times that I have known the Holy Spirit to be so close. Two I would relay to you. One, was when my son, Austin, was so sick the doctors felt he may not make it. In that moment, because of my faith and the prayers of so many others, I am convinced I knew the great calm of God with me. My wife and I did not feel alone. I did not know what was going to happen, and I didn't even really ask God to change it. I simply was so thankful for God being present, being with Austin, being with us. It was a remarkable calm.

My conversion itself was a moment when I was all alone, and feeling somewhat lonely, and yet God was there, I felt it like never before. I knew I was part of the Reign of God, and there was the deepest calm that came over me.

These darkest places, are where I met God, who I believe is always there, but in our comfort, and our happiness, and our selfishness to a degree, I sometimes, do not have time to recognize him present with me. it is not God, it is I that has taken my eye off God, not God that has taken God's eyes off me.

As to my call to the priesthood, and to the episcopate, I would say, I listen in the silence, and personally hear much there, but to me the true discernment and the true voice of God comes to me through the voices of others. It means a lot to me that the Hebrew word for Spirit is Ruah, which also means breath. With every breath the Spirit infuses us. We take in the Spirit and we give it. So, all my life I heard others saying, you should be a priest, even those who didn't even go to church. So, those became signs and messages.

Patrick knew this. He was able to share it so that his people knew it too. May it be so for all of you.

Again, I am so sorry not to be with you but I look forward to the next time we see each other and are able to be with each other.

I will really miss getting a selfie with all of you too! Next time!

Blessings to all of you, and I hope you have a sacred, holy, and joyful rest of the weekend.

In Christ's Love,

+Greg