



## ST. PATRICK AND SEVEN OTHER IRISH SAINTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

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### A LOOK AT THE LAND OF SAINTS AND SCHOLARS

By Gerald Korson

Ask for the name of a saint from Ireland and most people immediately will mention St. Patrick. They might go on to explain how he used the three-leafed shamrock to explain the Holy Trinity and cite the legend of St. Patrick driving the snakes out of Ireland. But many would be hard pressed to identify another Irish saint.

As we prepare to celebrate St. Patrick's Day on March 17 with parades, bagpipes and green beer (which they would never drink in Ireland), as well as tales of rainbows, leprechauns and pots of gold, let us look at the holy man and bishop, along with seven others associated with the Emerald Isle.



Although Patrick was not a native of the land — he was born in what is now England, in the late fourth century when it was part of the Roman Empire — he is one of the patron saints of Ireland. Kidnapped as a teen by Irish pirates and held captive for six years, he later returned to Ireland as a missionary bishop. His *Confessions*, relating the major events of his life, begins with a humble statement, “My name is Patrick, a sinner, a simple country person, and the least of all believers.” One of the holiest natural sites in Ireland is Croagh Patrick, a mountain where he fasted 40 days in imitation of Jesus in the desert. After laboring and preaching for 40 years, Patrick died in 461 and his remains are believed to be in Down Cathedral.

(CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz, Long Island Catholic)

Although Patrick gets the accolades this month, we also pay tribute to a handful of other holy ones associated with the land of saints and scholars.

**St. Palladius**, also born in Roman Britain, preceded St. Patrick as a missionary to Ireland in 431, sent by the pope to serve as bishop to the “Irish who believed in Christ.” Apparently, the Christian faith had already been introduced to Ireland, probably by British merchants, refugees or slaves like Patrick. Palladius established at least three churches but did not remain long in Ireland. Feast day: July 7.

**St. Brigid of Kildare**, born in the fifth-century, established monastic institutions, one for men and one for women, and served as abbess of the latter. She is the second in veneration in Irish history, which is why Patrick and Brigid (and their variants) became the two most popular names in Irish Catholic families. Feast day: Feb. 1

**St. Brendan the Navigator** was a sixth-century priest who built a monastery near Galway that housed as many as 3,000 monks. As his moniker implies, he had considerable seafaring abilities and sailed to Scotland, Wales and France, sometimes founding new monasteries. Legend has him exploring the seas in search of the “Isle of the Blessed,” where his expedition encounters many fanciful creatures and historical figures before returning to Ireland. Some claim Brendan sailed to Greenland and the North American coast centuries before Columbus. Feast day: May 16.

**St. Columba (Columcille)** of Iona was a sixth-century monk who had artistic skills in illumination — the enhancement of a manuscript with highly decorative calligraphy, borders (marginalia), and miniature illustrations. He founded a monastery on the island of Iona, off

Scotland's coast, where his monks produced many beautiful illuminated manuscripts, the most famous of which is the "Book of Kells." He, too, is a patron saint of Ireland. Feast day: June 9.

**St. Aidan** was born in Ireland and became a missionary bishop who preached in England's Northumbria and founded the famed monastery of Lindisfarne, off the English coast. Known for his strict fasts and disciplines, he often walked from town to town, spreading the faith and renewing devotion among the people. Feast day: Aug. 31.

**St. Oliver Plunkett**, a 17th-century archbishop of Armagh and primate of Ireland, served during a time of intense persecution of Catholics under English rule. He was implicated in the "Popish Plot," a conspiracy theory claiming that Catholics were scheming to assassinate the English king. He was arrested on charges of treason "for promoting the Roman faith," faced trial in London, and condemned to death. He was hanged, drawn and quartered in Tyburn in 1681. Canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1975, he became the first new Irish saint in nearly 700 years. Feast day: July 1.

**Blessed Columba Marmion**, a 19th-century Benedictine abbot from Dublin, was a noted spiritual writer and retreat master. His spirituality was centered on the disciple's status as adopted children of God through Baptism. "When God says to us, 'Be perfect,'" Abbot Marmion wrote, "He knows all that He is asking of us, yet at the same time He requires nothing beyond our power, when we rely on His grace." He died in 1923 and was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2000. Feast day: Oct. 3.

May St. Patrick — and all the saints of Ireland — pray for us.

### **About the Author**

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