

Saint Patrick Letter to the soldiers of Coroticus

1 - I declare that I, Patrick, – an unlearned sinner indeed – have been established a bishop in Ireland. I hold quite certainly that what I am, I have accepted from God. I live as an alien among non-Roman peoples, an exile on account of the love of God – he is my witness that this is so. It is not that I would choose to let anything so blunt and harsh come from my mouth, but I am driven by the zeal for God. And the truth of Christ stimulates me, for love of neighbours and children: for these, I have given up my homeland and my parents, and my very life to death, if I am worthy of that. I live for my God, to teach these peoples, even if I am despised by some.

2 - With my own hand I have written and put together these words to be given and handed on and sent to the soldiers of Coroticus. I cannot say that they are my fellow-citizens, nor fellow-citizens of the saints of Rome, but fellow-citizens of demons, because of their evil works. By their hostile ways they live in death, allies of the apostate Scots and Picts. They are blood-stained: blood-stained with the blood of innocent Christians, whose numbers I have given birth to in God and confirmed in Christ.

3 - The newly baptised and anointed were dressed in white robes; the anointing was still to be seen clearly on their foreheads when they were cruelly slain and sacrificed by the sword of the ones I referred to above. On the day after that, I sent a letter by a holy priest (whom I had taught from infancy), with clerics, to ask that they return to us some of the booty or of the baptised prisoners they had captured. They scoffed at them.

4 - So I don't know which is the cause of the greatest grief for me: whether those who were slain, or those who were captured, or those whom the devil so deeply ensnared. They will face the eternal pains of Gehenna equally with the devil; because whoever commits sin is rightly called a slave and a son of the devil.

5 - For this reason, let every God-fearing person know that those people are alien to me and to Christ my God, for whom I am an ambassador: father-slayers, brother-slayers, they are savage wolves devouring the people of God as they would bread for food. It is just as it is said: 'The wicked have routed your law, O Lord' – the very law which in recent times he so graciously planted in Ireland and, with God's help, has taken root.

6 - I am not forcing myself in where I have no right to act. I have a part with those whom God called and destined to preach the gospel, even in persecutions which are no small matter, to the very ends of the earth. This is despite the malice of the Enemy through the tyranny of Coroticus, who respects neither God, nor his priests whom God chose and granted the divine and sublime power that whatever they would bind upon earth would be bound also in the heavens.

7 - Therefore I ask most of all that all the holy and humble of heart should not fawn on such people, nor even share food or drink with them, nor accept their alms, until such time as they make satisfaction to God in severe penance and shedding of tears, and until they set free the men-servants of God and the baptised women servants of Christ, for whom he died and was crucified.

8 - The Most High does not accept the gifts of evildoers. The one who offers a sacrifice taken from what belongs to the poor is like one who sacrifices a child in the very sight of the child's father. Riches, says Scripture, which a person gathers unjustly, will be vomited out of that person's stomach. The angel of death will drag such a one away, to be crushed by the anger of dragons. Such a one will the tongue of a serpent slay, and the fire which cannot be extinguished will consume. And Scripture also says: 'Woe to those who fill themselves with what does not belong to them'. And: 'What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and yet suffer the loss of his or her soul?'

9 - It would take a long time to discuss or refer one by one, and to gather from the whole law all that is stated about such greed. Avarice is a deadly crime. Do not covet your neighbour's goods. Do not kill. The murderer can have no part with Christ. Whoever hates a brother is guilty of homicide. Also: Whoever does not love a brother remains in death. How much more guilty is the one who stained his hands in the blood of the children of God, who God only lately acquired in the most distant parts of the earth through the encouragement of one as unimportant as I am!

10 - Surely it was not without God, or simply out of human motives, that I came to Ireland! Who was it who drove me to it? I am so bound by the Spirit that I no longer see my own kindred. Is it just from myself that comes the holy mercy in how I act towards that people who at one time took me captive and slaughtered the men and women servants in my father's home? In my human nature I was born free, in that I was born of a decurion father. But I sold out my noble state for the sake of others – and I am not ashamed of that, nor do I repent of it. Now, in Christ, I am a slave of a foreign people, for the sake of the indescribable glory of eternal life which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

11 - If my own people do not recognise me, still no prophet is honoured in his own country. Could it be that we are not of the one sheepfold, nor that we have the one God as our Father? As Scripture says: 'Whoever is not with me is against me'; and 'whoever does not gather with me, scatters'. But it is not right that one destroys while another builds. I do not seek what is mine: it is not my own grace, but God who put this concern in my heart, that I would be one of the hunters or fishers whom God at one time foretold would be here in the final days.

12 - They watch me with malice. What am I to do, Lord? I am greatly despised. See – your sheep around me are mangled and preyed upon, and this by the thieves I mentioned before, at the bidding of the evil-minded Coroticus. He is far from the love of God, who betrays Christians into the hands of Scots and Picts. Greedy wolves have devoured the flock of the Lord, which was flourishing in Ireland under the very best of care – I just can't count the number of sons of Scots and daughters of kings who are now monks and virgins of Christ. So the injuries done to good people will not please you – even in the very depths it will not please.

13 - Who among the holy people would not be horrified to take pleasure or to enjoy a banquet with such people? They have filled their homes with what they stole from dead Christians; they live on what they plundered. These wretched people don't realise that they offer deadly poison as food to their friends and children. It is just like Eve, who did not understand that it was really death that she offered her man. This is how it is with those who do evil: they work for death as an everlasting punishment.

14 - The Christians of Roman Gaul have the custom of sending holy and chosen men to the Franks and to other pagan peoples with so many thousands in money to buy back the baptised who have been taken prisoner. You, on the other hand, kill them, and sell them to foreign peoples who have no knowledge of God. You hand over the members of Christ as it were to a brothel. What hope have you in God? Who approves of what you do, or who ever speaks words of praise? God will be the judge, for it is written: 'Not only the doers of evil, but also those who go along with it, are to be condemned'.

15 - I do not know what to say, or how I can say any more, about the children of God who are dead, whom the sword has touched so cruelly. All I can do is what is written: 'Weep with those who weep'; and again: 'If one member suffers pain, let all the members suffer the pain with it'. This is why the church mourns and weeps for its sons and daughters whom the sword has not yet slain, but who were taken away and exported to far distant lands, where grave sin openly flourishes without shame, where freeborn people have been sold off, Christians reduced to slavery: slaves particularly of the lowest and worst of the apostate Picts.

16 - That is why I will cry aloud with sadness and grief: O my fairest and most loving brothers and sisters whom I begot without number in Christ, what am I to do for you? I am not worthy to come to the aid either of God or of human beings. The evil of evil people has prevailed over us. We have been made as if we were complete outsiders. Can it be they do not believe that we have received one and the same Baptism, or that we have one and the same God as father. For them, it is a disgrace that we are from Ireland. Remember what Scripture says: 'Do you not have the one God? Then why have you each abandoned your neighbour?'

17 - That is why I grieve for you; I grieve for you who are so very dear to me. And yet I rejoice within myself: I have not worked for nothing; my wanderings have not been in vain. This unspeakably horrifying crime has been carried out. But, thanks to God, you who are baptised believers have moved on from this world to paradise. I see you clearly: you have begun your journey to where there is no night, nor sorrow, nor death, any more. Rather, you leap for joy, like calves set free from chains, and you tread down the wicked, and they will be like ashes under your feet.

18 - And so, you will reign with apostles and prophets and martyrs. You will take possession of an eternal kingdom, as he (Christ) testifies in these words: 'They will come from the east and from the west, and they will recline at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens. Left outside are dogs and sorcerers and murderers; with the lying perjurers, their lot is in the pool of eternal fire'. It is not without cause that the apostle says: 'If it is the case that a just person can be saved only with difficulty, where will the sinner and the irreverent transgressor of the law find himself?'

19 - So where will Coroticus and his villainous rebels against Christ find themselves – those who divide out defenceless baptised women as prizes, all for the sake of a miserable temporal kingdom, which will pass away in a moment of time. Just as cloud of smoke is blown away by the wind, that is how deceitful sinners will perish from the face of the Lord. The just, however, will banquet in great constancy with Christ. They will judge nations, and will rule over evil kings for all ages. Amen.

20 - I bear witness before God and his angels that it will be as he made it known to one of my inexperience. These are not my own words which I have put before you in Latin; they are the words of God, and of the apostles and prophets, who have never lied. 'Anyone who believes will be saved; anyone who does not believe will be condemned' – God has spoken.

21 - I ask insistently whatever servant of God is courageous enough to be a bearer of these messages, that it in no way be withdrawn or hidden from any person. Quite the opposite – let it be read before all the people, especially in the presence of Coroticus himself. If this takes place, God may inspire them to come back to their right senses before God. However late it may be, may they repent of acting so wrongly, the murder of the brethren of the Lord, and set free the baptised women prisoners whom they previously seized. So may they deserve to live for God, and be made whole here and in eternity. Peace to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.