

Saints be praised !

By some inscrutable grace, the Ukrainian Catholic Church which my grandfather helped to found ended up in a Syracuse neighborhood know as « Tipperary Hill » - i.e., very Irish. Since my parents were eager to have me go to the parish elementary school, we moved within 1 ½ blocks of the school shortly after my 5 th birthday – which, of course, means that I grew up surrounded by families named Kennedy and Hayes and Collins. Moreover, the homestead was equidistant from various Irish-run establishments : Coleman's Saloon and Hennessy's Pizza Pantry to the east, and Hennigan's grocery store, the Little Shamrock Saloon, and the Callahan, Hanley, and Mooney funeral home to the west. The most noteworthy landmark of the neighborhood was an upside-down traffic light, where the green-on-top dominated the color of the redcoats. You can imagine the culture shock when Mrs. Bachinsky tried – unsuccessfully, I might add – to teach me Ukrainian at school. Is it any wonder that, years later, I was to feel right at home with the « Fighting Irish » of the University of Notre Dame ?

The onset of March recalls the highlight of the Tipperary Hill year – St. Patty's Day. The experience of living between two Irish saloons was later to be repeated at Notre Dame as merrymakers returned to campus on March 18 th beneath the windows of my early-morning classes. The experience of the street-painting in front of Coleman's remained unsurpassed until I moved to Chicago, where they dyed the whole river green ! Indeed, it was not until I moved to Chicago that I learned the truth about St. Patrick's true allegiances : as the Ukrainians tell it, he was a Ukrainian patriot who arrived in Ireland with a Ukrainian flag in his pocket ; unfortunately, the humidity of the Emerald Isle caused the blue and yellow to run, turning the flag green. Whatever !

People in Chicago and North Dakota may remember Fr. Tom Glynn of happy memory. Though proudly Irish, Fr. Tom was the first priest to be ordained for the newly-erected St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy. Doubtless over soda bread and coffee, Fr. Tom would refer to the St. Patty's Day hype as « foolishness » : in Ireland, there was none of that, people simply went to Mass – at least before the recent scandals destroyed any confidence which the people had in the Church institution.

The Irish Church, it seems to many, had become unfaithful to the legacy of St. Patrick. The holy bishop came to spread a Gospel which was indeed « Good News » - a source of joy as lively as a tin whistle, a source of enlightenment as rich as the illuminated Book of Kells. Catholics clung to « Holy Mother the Church » over centuries of persecution as a shipwrecked sailor clings for dear life to wreckage of what had once been his very existence. That tenuous grasp upon familiar habits became more determined even as institutions became proud rather than attentive, burdensome and rigid rather than buoyantly life-giving. The last straw was to come for many in the form of a betrayal by heretofore trusted servants, a proverbial « kiss of Judas » offered by priests and religious.

What remains of the legacy ? Trappings – not only amid the Irish, but throughout Western Europe. Of course, neither Mishawaka nor Brussels residents brandish garish buttons with the message « Kiss me, I'm Belgian », nor do Minnesotans and Norwegians go hog wild drinking to St. Olaf ; nonetheless, glorious old churches in

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Norway and in Belgium stand as empty as they do here in France – and now even in Ireland, as Fr. Tom would sadly tell me. As for the substance, well ... that's relegated to history and theology books – which, by the way, sell far less well than tourist guides and coffee table art books.

A month or so ago, clergy and laity of the Paris-centered St. Volodymyr Eparchy gathered for a « sobor » at the bi-ritual (Byzantine and Roman) Benedictine monastery in Chevetogne, Belgium. We were divided into discussion groups, provided food for thought, and then asked for feedback. Well, let me tell you, feedback there indeed was ... and with vigor ! Amid the feedback was a question which made some squirm and others scream. The question : « Does the Ukrainian Catholic Church exist to spread the Gospel or Ukrainian language and culture ? » I am again reminded of the WWJD bracelets : What Would Jesus Do ? I have my answer. How about you ?

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