



The musical for my senior year was *My Fair Lady*, which I know isn't exactly the top pick for any high school music department nowadays. Nevertheless, the show went on, and I was cast nowhere near the lead of Henry Higgins, the pompous phonetics professor who's convinced he can miraculously transform a Cockney-accent impoverished-class Eliza Doolittle into a member of high society in London, England. But long before our humble attempts at pulling off "I Could Have

Danced All Night" or "Get Me to the Church on Time," there were countless other performances in relatively small auditoriums scattered across this country for the last half of the 20th century. And before all those teenagers took the stage, there was Rex Harrison and Audrey Hepburn, who captured America's heart in the mid-1960's, when the film version won eight Academy Awards. But even before that, there was *Pygmalion*, the book that was part of our required reading during that same senior year, which I may or may not have read in its entirety, but nevertheless, it served as the original source for God only knows how many adaptations in Hollywood and high school auditoriums for a hundred years to come.

The man who was the ultimate inspiration to, "Why can't the English learn to speak?" and "I've grown accustomed to her face" was none other than George Bernard Shaw, whose beloved home was Dublin, Ireland. Yes, the place that will receive its fair share of attention tomorrow, perhaps more so in local pubs and other fine establishments around the world, with a little devotion to the cherished St. Patrick, and maybe a few images popping up of the greenest of greens from their most tranquil landscape.

However, one of the most beneficial contributions from the Emerald Isle to the rest of the world is the collection of incredibly talented writers, which, again to the modern audience may not be the most edge-of-your-seat reading per say. But regardless, the works of James Joyce and Oscar Wilde and Samul Beckett and W. B. Yeats still reel in their fair share of literary enthusiasts, and not just with the required high school readers. Of course, the best of story tellers are the ones who can not only tell you about something that happened in London between a well-to-do professor and a poor flower girl, but to tell the story in such a way that you can easily connect it with your own life.

And yes, we in the church know full well of the plenty of instances of a like-Henry Higgins who desperately tried to improve other children of God, who were believed to be not good enough in their speaking or singing or behaving or whatever else. We have had more than our fair share of Henry Higgins who tried to ensure that the church building would be a place of a certain level of class. However, the problem is that Christ kept on reeling people in, even more than *Pygmalion* and *My Fair Lady* or any human production ever could. Part of that collective story is the emotionally-charged writings from the Psalms, including today's assertion that "the Lord is [their] light and [their] salvation," as if they will not fear anyone who tells them otherwise, as if they don't have to reach a certain level of religious status in order to obtain Jesus Christ in their life.

And there is also the blessed assurance that that goodness of the Lord is not limited to the serene tranquility of heaven, but that it somehow emerges in the land of the living: that it continues in the stories not just from the prolific authors and Scripture-shapers, but in the stories from those often looked down upon by the rest.

Supposedly, St. Patrick himself was one of them: captured into slavery and taken to an island that was considered reprehensible by the elite, but God convinced him otherwise. Soon enough, Christ kept on reeling people in all over the Emerald Isle. And in the same place where the beloved George Bernard Shaw was born, stands the cathedral, where it is believed the beloved St. Patrick baptized newcomers to the faith, including those who weren't so sure they were worthy of God's attention whatsoever. Nevertheless, the story of boundless love and unconditional grace and relentless mercy had reeled them in, and continues to do so at St. Patrick's Cathedral nearly a thousand years later.

Unfortunately, we don't know the entire story of the patron saint of Ireland, but one of the prayers accredited to him is a most fitting reminder not just for tomorrow, but all our days:

Arise today, through The strength of heaven, The light of the sun, The radiance of the moon, The splendor of fire, The speed of lightning, The swiftness of wind, The depth of the sea, The stability of the earth, The firmness of rock.

I arise today, through God's strength to pilot me, God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me, God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me, God's shield to protect me. As if each day, we rise not just with any miniscule portion of the Divine, but we rise with all that God has to offer: with all the love and grace and mercy to sustain us, even on the days when we're not so sure we deserve it at all. But, rest assured, Christ has already reeled you in with joy from the beginning, and he is never ever going to let you go. And for that Greatest Story of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!