



It is the most cherished Psalm for many children of God, to say the least: including the lines, “The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.” So, it is rather fitting that in a couple days, seemingly countless people will be decked out in that same color attire to celebrate not just St. Patrick, but the country whose fame is forever connected to its most serene landscape of rolling hills and vibrant farmland and picturesque mountains and soaring cliffs. Of course, with the over 6

million tourists who visit the Emerald Isle each year, some of the more famous attractions can get rather crowded, to put it mildly: from the Cliffs of Moher on the western coast to Trinity College in the east, and maybe even, if we’re honest, the Guinness Brewery Storehouse in the heart of Dublin.

But there’s this one place that isn’t quite as frequented by the massive buses and the rental cars of all those who don’t always know how to drive on a different side of the road than what they’re used to on this side of the pond: County Mayo is oftentimes overlooked, in the northwest corner of the Republic of Ireland; known for its fair share of green tranquility as well, not to mention the longest coastline of any county in the country, and even taller cliffs than the more famous ones of Moher. And then, there’s Croagh Patrick, considered the “Holy Mountain of Ireland,” because it is there that tradition has it that St. Patrick hiked the 2,500 feet to its summit to fast for 40 days and nights and engage in prayer, oddly enough, during the season we now know as Lent. It is believed that from there, came further inspiration from God for his ministry to the people of Ireland, and, whether you choose to believe the folklore or not, that all snakes were, at that point, driven out from the island country ever since.

Nevertheless, the “Holy Mountain of Ireland,” for the last 1500 years or so, has become a cherished pilgrimage site for the Irish and people all over the world, most often done the last Sunday in July, if you wish to put that on your calendar and start working on your cardiovascular exercise to make the rather steep hike. Of course, some of us Christians would say you don’t have to go up a mountain to find the universal God, no matter how special that experience would be to feel a unique connection to a treasured saint. You don’t have to make the trek across the Atlantic to feel peace and wholeness, even though the Emerald Isle has more than its fair share to bring the 23rd Psalm to dazzling life. Nevertheless, we would say that the treasured Psalm for many children of God around the world is fulfilled to the holiest and most awe-inspiring level not in the most majestic scenery of the Creation, but ultimately in Jesus Christ: the One for whom St. Patrick risked his very life for in proclaiming the Gospel to a people who weren’t so sure what it meant for them.

After all, it is in Jesus Christ that we are blessed with the shepherd who will guide us along beautiful rolling hills, as well as the most rugged terrain of life that we never planned for at all. It is in Jesus Christ where we find the pastures of the greatest safety, setting us free from sin and death ultimately defining our eternal journey. It is in Jesus Christ that we are restored to new life because, time and time again, forgiveness and grace and mercy will always be placed right in front of us, always meant to dazzle our hearts and minds more than any cliffside over an ocean front. It is in Jesus Christ whose love for us will never relent, even in the valley of the shadow of death, where the Savior promises to walk with us to even greener pastures, even stiller waters than even the Emerald Isle has to offer to this world. And yes, already in Jesus Christ, already in this lifetime, the Messiah insists that goodness and

mercy will follow you no matter where you go, whether in the most beautiful surroundings when all seems to be well with the soul, or amidst the most dismal pit when everything seems to be going wrong; God will never stop from finding a way to ensure that that life-defining goodness and mercy forever reaches you as a most precious child of the Divine.

Yes, we are invited to join in the celebration this week, celebrating the courageous life of St. Patrick and marveling over the beauty of the nation on the receiving end of the Gospel shared in his ministry. But ultimately, we give thanks to the God who Patrick met not only on the mountaintop, but in each person who desperately yearned for hope and grace and new life, and ultimately found it not just in St. Patrick, but in Jesus Christ, the Lord of All Hopefulness for Ireland and all of us, to be sure. So, for that Greatest News for us all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!