

THE CONFESSION OF SAINT PATRICK

THE BEGINNING
OF THE BOOKS
OF THE BISHOP OF
ST. PATRICK



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I, Patrick, a sinner, the rudest and least of all the faithful, and most contemptible to very many, had for my father Calpornius, a deacon, the son of Potitus, a priest, who lived in Bannaven Taberniae, for he had a small country-house close by, where I was taken captive when I was nearly sixteen years of age. I knew not the true God, and I was brought captive to Ireland with many thousand men, as we deserved; for we had forsaken God, and had not kept His commandments, and were disobedient to our priests, who admonished us for our salvation. And the Lord brought down upon us the anger of His Spirit, and scattered us among many nations, even to the ends of the earth, where now my littleness may be seen amongst strangers. And there the Lord showed me my unbelief, that at length I might remember my iniquities, and strengthen my whole heart towards the Lord my God, who looked down upon my humiliation, and had pity upon my youth and ignorance, and kept me before I knew him, and before I had wisdom or could distinguish between good and evil, and strengthened and comforted me as a father would his son.

Therefore I cannot and ought not to be silent concerning the great benefits and graces which the Lord has bestowed upon me in the land of my captivity, since the only return we can make for such benefits is, after God has reproved us, to extol and confess His wonders before every nation under heaven.

For there is no other God, nor ever was, nor shall be hereafter, except the Lord, the unbegotten Father, without beginning, by whom all things have their being, who upholds all things, as we have said; and His Son, Jesus Christ, whom, together with the Father, we testify to have always existed before the origin of the world, spiritually with the Father, ineffably begotten before every beginning; and by Him were the visible things made—was made man, death being overthrown, in the heavens. And he hath given Him all power over every name of things in heaven and earth and hell, that every tongue should confess to Him that Jesus Christ is

Lord, and whose coming we expect ere long to judge the living and dead; who will render to every one according to his works; who hath poured forth abundantly on us both the gift of His Spirit and the pledge of immortality; who makes the faithful and obedient to become the sons of God and coheirs with Christ; whom we confess and adore one God in the Trinity of the holy Name. For He Himself has said by the prophet: "Call upon me in the day of thy trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt magnify me." And again he says: "It is honorable to reveal and confess the works of God."

Although I am imperfect in many things, I wish my brothers and acquaintances to know my dispositions, that they may be able to understand the desire of my soul. I am not ignorant of the testimony of my Lord, who declares in the psalm: "Thou wilt destroy all that speak a lie." And again: "The mouth that believeth, killeth the soul." And the same Lord: "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the Day of Judgment." Therefore I ought, with great fear and trembling, to dread this sentence in that day when no one shall be able to withdraw or hide himself, but all must give an account, even of the least sins, before the judgment-seat of the Lord Christ.

Therefore, although I thought of writing long ago, I feared the censure of men, because I had not learned as the others who studied the sacred writings in the best way, and have never changed their language since their childhood, but continually learned it more perfectly, while I have to translate my words and speech into a foreign tongue; and it can be easily proved from the style of my writings how I am instructed in speech and learning, for the Wise Man says: "By the tongue wisdom is discerned, and understanding and knowledge and learning by the word of the wise." But what avails an excuse, however true, especially when accompanied with presumption? For I, in my old age, strive after that which I was hindered from learning in my youth. But who will believe me? And if I say what I have said before, that as a mere youth, nay, almost a boy in words, I was taken captive, before I knew what I ought to seek and to avoid. Therefore I blush to-day and greatly dread to expose my ignorance, because I am not

able to express myself briefly, with clear and well-arranged words, as the spirit desires and the mind and intellect point out. But if it had been given to me as to others, I would not have been silent for the recompense; and although it may seem to some who think thus that I put myself forward with my ignorance and too slow tongue, nevertheless it is written, "The tongues of stammerers shall speak readily and plain"; how much more ought we to undertake this who are the epistle of Christ for salvation unto the ends of the earth, written in pure heart, if not with eloquence, yet with power and endurance, "not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God"; and again the Spirit testifies, "Husbandry, it was ordained by the Most High."

Therefore I undertook this work at first, though a rustic and a fugitive, and not knowing how to provide for the future; but this I know for certain: that before I was humbled, I was like a stone lying in deep mire, until He who is powerful came, and in his mercy raised me up, and indeed again succored and placed me in His part; and therefore I ought to cry out loudly, and thank the Lord in some degree for all his benefits, here and after, which the mind of man cannot estimate. Therefore be amazed, both great and small who fear God; rhetoricians and ye of the Lord, hear and enquire who aroused me, a fool, from the midst of those who seem to be wise, and skilled in the law, and powerful in speech and in all things, and hath inspired me (if indeed I be such) beyond others, though I am despised by this world, so that, with fear and reverence and without murmuring, I should faithfully serve this nation, to whom the charity of Christ hath transferred me, and given me for my life, if I shall survive; and that at last with humility and truth I should serve them.

In the measure, therefore, of the faith of the Trinity it behoves me to distinguish without shrinking from danger, and to make known the gift of God and everlasting consolation, and, without fear, confidently to spread abroad the name of God everywhere, so that after my death I may leave it to my Gallican brethren and to my sons, many thousands of whom I have baptized in the Lord. And I was neither worthy nor deserving that the Lord should so favor me, his servant, after such afflictions and great

difficulties, after captivity, after many years, as to grant me such grace for this nation—a thing which, still in my youth, I had neither hoped for nor thought of.

But after I had come to Ireland, I was daily tending sheep, and I prayed frequently during the day, and the love of God, and His faith and fear, increased in me more and more, and the spirit was stirred; so that in a single day I have said as many as a hundred prayers, and in the night nearly the same; so that I remained in the woods, and on the mountain, even before the dawn, I was roused to prayer, in snow, and ice, and rain, and I felt no injury from it, nor was there any slothfulness in me, as I see now, because the spirit was then fervent in me. And there one night I heard a voice, while I slept, saying to me: “Thou dost fast well; fasting thou shalt soon go to thy country.” And again, after a very short time, I heard a response, saying to me: “Behold, thy ship is ready.” And the place was not near, but perhaps about two hundred miles distant, and I had never been there, nor did I know any one who lived there.

Soon after this, I fled, and left the man with whom I had been six years, and I came in the strength of the Lord, who directed my way for good; and I feared nothing until I arrived at that ship. And the day on which I came the ship had moved out of her place; and I asked to go and sail with them, but the master was displeased, and replied angrily: “Do not seek to go with us.” And when I heard this, I went from them to go thither where I had lodged; and I began to pray as I went; but before I had ended my prayer, I heard one of them calling out loudly after me, “Come quickly, for these men are calling you”; and I returned to them immediately, and they began saying to me; “Come, we receive thee in good faith; make such friendship with us as you wish.” And then that day I disdained to supplicate them, on account of the fear of God; but I hoped of them that they would come into the faith of Jesus Christ, for they were Gentiles; and this I obtained from them; and after three days, we reached land, and for twenty-eight days we journeyed through a desert, and their provisions failed, and they suffered greatly from hunger; and one day the master began to say to me: “What sayest thou, O Christian? Your God is great and all-powerful;

why canst thou not, then, pray for us, since we are perishing with hunger, and may never see the face of man again?” And I said to them plainly: “Turn sincerely to the Lord my God, to whom nothing is impossible, that He may send us food on your way until ye are satisfied, for it abounds everywhere for Him.” And with God’s help it was so done; for, lo! a flock of swine appeared in the way before our eyes, and they killed many of them, and remained there two nights, much refreshed and filled with their flesh; for many of them had been left exhausted by the wayside. After this, they gave the greatest thanks to God, and I was honored in their eyes.

They also found wild honey, and offered me some of it, and one of them said: “This is offered in sacrifice, thanks be to God”; after this, I tasted no more. But the same night, while I was sleeping, I was strongly tempted by Satan (of which I shall be mindful as long as I shall be in this body), and there fell, as it were, a great stone upon me, and there was no strength in my limbs. And then it came into my mind, I know not bow, to call upon Elias, and at the same moment I saw the sun rising in the heavens; and while I cried out Elias with all my might, behold! the splendor of the sun was shed upon me, and immediately shook from me all heaviness. And I believe that Christ my Lord cried out for me; and I hope that it will be so in the day of my adversity, as the Lord testifies in the Gospel: “It is not you that speak,” etc.

Some time after, I was taken captive; and on the first night I remained with them I heard a divine response, saying: “You shall be two months with them”; and so it was. On the sixtieth night the Lord delivered me out of their hands, and on the road He provided for us food, and fire, and dry weather daily, until on the fourteenth day we all came. As I have above mentioned, we journeyed twenty-eight days through a desert, and on the night of our arrival we had no provisions left.

And again, after a few years, I was with my relations in Britain, who received me as a son, and earnestly besought me that then, at least, after I had gone through so many tribulations, I would go nowhere from them. And there I saw, in the midst of the night, a man who appeared to come

from Ireland, whose name was Victorious, and he had innumerable letters with him, one of which he gave to me; and I read the commencement of the epistle containing "The Voice of the Irish"; and as I read aloud the beginning of the letter, I thought I heard in my mind the voice of those who were near the wood of Focluti, which is near the western sea; and they cried out: "We entreat thee, holy youth, to come and walk still amongst us." And my heart was greatly touched, so that I could not read any more, and so I awoke. Thanks be to God that, after very many years, the Lord hath granted them their desire!

And on another night, whether in me or near me God knows, I heard eloquent words which I could not understand until the end of the speech, when it was said: "He who gave His life for thee is He who speaks in thee"; and so I awoke full of joy. And again, I saw one praying within me, and I was, as it were, within my body, and I heard, that is, above the inner man, and there he prayed earnestly with groans. And I was amazed at this, and marvelled, and considered who this could be who prayed in me. But at the end of the prayer it came to pass that it was a bishop, and I awoke and remembered that the apostle said: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings." And again: "The Lord is our advocate, who also maketh intercession for us." [And when I was tried by some of my elders, who came and spoke of my sins as an objection to my laborious episcopate, I was on that day sometimes strongly driven to fall away here and for ever. But the Lord spared a proselyte and a stranger for His name's sake, and mercifully assisted me greatly in that affliction, because I was not entirely deserving of reproach. I pray God that they may not be found guilty of giving an occasion of sin; they found me after thirty years, and brought against me words that I had confessed before I was a deacon; from anxiety, with sorrow of mind, I told my dearest friend what I had done in my youth, in one day, nay, rather in one hour, because I was not then able to overcome. I know not, God knows, if I was then fifteen years of age, and from my childhood I did not believe in the living God, but remained in death and unbelief until I was severely chastised, and, in truth, I have been humbled by hunger and nakedness;

and even now I did not come to Ireland of my own will until I was nearly worn out. But this proved a blessing to me, for I was thus corrected by the Lord, and he made me fit to be to-day that which was once far from my thoughts, so that I should care for the salvation of others, for at that time I had no thought even for myself.

And in the night of the day in which I was reprov'd for the things above mentioned, I saw in the night.] I saw in a vision of the night a writing without honor before me. And then I heard an answer saying to me, "We have heard with displeasure the face of the elect without a name." He did not say, "Thou hast badly seen," but "We have badly seen," as if he had there joined himself to me, as he said: "He that touches you is as he who toucheth the apple of my eye." Therefore I give thanks to Him who comforted me in all things that He did not hinder me from the journey which I had proposed, and also as regards my work which I had learned of Christ. But from this thing I felt no little strength, and my faith was approved before God and man.

Therefore I dare to say that my conscience does not reproach me now or for the future. I have the testimony of God now that I have not lied in the words I have told you. [But I feel the more grieved that my dearest friend, to whom I would have trusted even my life, should have occasioned this. And I learned from certain brethren that, before this defence, when I was not present, nor even in Britain, and with which I had nothing to do, that he defended me in my absence. He had even said to me with his own lips: "Thou art going to be given the rank of bishop," though I was not worthy of it. How, then, did it happen to him that afterwards, before all persons, good and bad, he should detract me publicly, when he had before this freely and gladly praised me? And the Lord, who is greater than all? I have said enough. Still, I ought not to hide the gift of God which he gave me in the land of my captivity, for I sought him earnestly then, and found him there, and He preserved me from all iniquity, I believe, through the indwelling of His Spirit, which worketh within me unto this day more and more. But God knows, if it were man who spoke this to me, I would perhaps be silent for the love of Christ.

Therefore I give unceasing thanks to my God, who preserved me faithful in the day of my temptation, so that I can to-day offer him sacrifice confidently—the living sacrifice of my soul to Christ my Lord, who preserved me from all my troubles, so that I may say to Him: “Who am I, O Lord! or what is my calling, that divine grace should have so wrought with me, so that to-day I can so rejoice amongst the nations, and magnify Thy name, wherever I am, not only in prosperity, but also in adversity?” and I ought to receive equally whatever happens to me, whether good or evil, giving God thanks in all things, who hath shown me that I should, undoubtingly, without ceasing, believe in Him who hath heard me though I am ignorant, and that I should undertake, in those days, so holy and wonderful a work, and imitate those of whom our Lord predicted of old that they should preach His Gospel to all nations for a testimony before the end of the world; which has been accomplished, as we have seen. Behold, we are witnesses that the Gospel has been preached to the limits of human habitation.]

But it is too long to detail my labors particularly, or even partially. I will briefly say how the good God often delivered me from slavery and from twelve dangers by which my soul was threatened, besides many snares, and what in words I cannot express, and with which I will not trouble my readers. But God knows all things, even before they come to pass [as he does me, a poor creature. Therefore the divine voice very often admonished me to consider whence came this wisdom, which was not in me, who neither knew God nor the number of my days. Whence did I obtain afterwards the great and salutary gift to know or love God, and to leave my country and my relations, although many gifts were offered to me with sorrow and tears. And I offended many of my seniors then against my will. But, guided by God, I yielded in no way to them—not to me, but to God be the glory, who conquered in me, and resisted them all; so that I came to the Irish people to preach the Gospel, and bear with the injuries of the unbelieving, and listen to the reproach of being a stranger, and endure many persecutions, even to chains, and to give up my freedom for the benefit of others. And if I be worthy, I am ready to give up my life unhesitatingly and most cheerfully for His name, and thus, if the Lord

permit, I desire to spend it even until my death.]

For I am truly a debtor to God, who has given me so much grace that many people should be born again to God through me, and that for them everywhere should be ordained priests for this people, newly come to the faith, which the Lord took from the ends of the earth, as He promised formerly by His prophets: "Our fathers falsely prepared idols, and there is no profit in them, to thee the Gentiles come and will say." And again: "I have set thee to be the light of the Gentiles, that thou mayest be for salvation unto the utmost parts of the earth." And thus I wait the promise of Him who never fails, as He promises in the Gospel: "They shall come from the east and the west [from the north and from the south], and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." So we believe that the faithful shall come from all parts of the world.

Therefore we ought to fish well and diligently; as the Lord taught and said: "Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men." And again: "Behold, saith the Lord, I send many fishers and many hunters," etc. Therefore we should, by all means, set our nets in such a manner that a great multitude and a crowd may be caught therein for God, and that everywhere there may be priests who shall baptize and exhort a people who so need it and desire it; as the Lord teaches and admonishes in the Gospel, saying: "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, even to the consummation of the world." And again: "Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned." The rest are examples. [And again: "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all nations, and then shall the consummation come." And again, the Lord, speaking by the prophet, says: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith the Lord, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Moreover, upon my servants and handmaids in those days I will pour forth my spirit, and they shall prophesy." And Osee saith: "And I will

say to that which was not my people: Thou art my people: and to her who hath not found mercy; and they shall say; Thou art my God. And in the place where I said to them, You are not my people, it shall be said to them, Ye are the sons of the living God.”]

Wherefore behold how in Ireland they who never had the knowledge of God, and hitherto only worshipped unclean idols, have lately become the people of the Lord, and are called the sons of God. The sons of the Scoti and the daughters of princes are seen to be monks and virgins of Christ. [And there was one blessed Irish maiden, of adult age, noble and very beautiful, whom I baptized, and after a few days she came to us for a reason, and gave us to understand that she had received a command from God, and was informed that she was to become a virgin of Christ, and to draw near to God. Thanks be to God, six days after this she most excellently and eagerly entered on this state of life, which all the virgins of God now adopt, even against the will of their parents, even enduring reproaches and persecution from them, and notwithstanding they increase in number; and as for those who are born again in this way, we know not their number, except the widows and those who observe continency. But those who are in slavery are most severely persecuted, yet they persevere in spite of terrors and threats. But the Lord has given grace to many of my handmaids, for they zealously imitate him as far as they are able.

Therefore, though I could have wished to leave them, and had been ready and very desirous to go to Britannia, as if to my country and parents, and not that alone, but to go even to Gallia, to visit my brethren, and to see the face of my Lord's saints; and God knows that I desired it greatly. But I am bound in the spirit, and he who witnesseth will account me guilty if I do it, and I fear to lose the labor which I have commenced—and not I, but the Lord Christ, who commanded me to come and be with them for the rest of my life; if the Lord grants it, and keeps me from every evil way, that I should not sin before him. But I hope that which I am bound to do, but I trust not myself as long as I am in this body of death, for he is strong who daily tries to turn me from the faith, and from the sincere religious chastity to Christ my Lord, to which I have dedicated myself to the end of my

life, but the flesh, which is in enmity, always draws me to death—that is, to unlawful desires, that must be unlawfully gratified—and I know in part that I have not led a perfect life like other believers. But I confess to my Lord, and do not blush before him, because I tell the truth, that from the time I knew him in my youth the love of God and his fear increased within me, and until now, by the favor of the Lord, I have kept the faith.

Let him who pleases insult and laugh at me; I will not be silent, neither do I conceal the signs and wonders that the Lord hath shown to me many years before they took place, as he who knew all things even before the world began. Therefore I ought to give thanks to God without ceasing, who often pardoned my uncalled-for folly and negligence, who did not let his anger turn fiercely against me, who allowed me to work with him, though I did not promptly follow what was shown me and what the Spirit suggested; and the Lord had compassion on me among thousands and thousands, because he saw my good-will; but then I knew not what to do, because many were hindering my mission, and were talking behind my back, and saying: “Why does he run into danger among enemies who know not God?” This was not said with malice, but because they did not approve of it, but, as I now testify, because of my rusticity, you understand; and I did not at once recognize the grace which was then in me, but now I know I should have known before.

Therefore I have simply related to my brethren and fellow-servants who have believed me why I have preached and still preach to strengthen and confirm your faith. Would that you also might aim at higher things and succeed better. This shall be my glory, because a wise son is the glory of his father. You know and God knows how I have lived among you from my youth up, both faithful in truth and sincere in heart; also, I have given the faith to the people among whom I dwell, and I will continue to do so. God knows I have not overreached any of them, nor do I think of it, because of God and his Church, lest I should excite persecution for them and all of us, and lest the name of the Lord should be blasphemed through me; for it is written, “Woe to the man through whom the name of the Lord is blasphemed.” For though I am unskilled in names, I have endeavored to

be careful even with my Christian brethren, and the virgins of Christ, and devout women, who freely gave me gifts, and cast of their ornaments upon the altar; but I returned them, though they were offended with me because I did so. But I, for the hope of immortality, guarded myself cautiously in all things, so that they could not find me unfaithful, even in the smallest matter, so that unbelievers could not defame or detract from my ministry in the least.

But when it happened that I baptized so many thousand men, did I expect even half a “screpall” from them? Tell me, and I will return it to you. Or when the Lord ordained clergy through my humility and ministry, did I confer the grace gratuitously? If I asked of any of them even the value of my shoe, tell me, and I will repay you more. I rather spent for you as far as I was able; and among you and everywhere for you I endured many perils in distant places, where none had been further or had ever come to baptize, or ordain the clergy, or confirm the people. By the grace of the Lord I labored freely and diligently in all things for your salvation. At this time also I used to give rewards to kings, whose sons I hired, who travelled with me, and who understood nothing but [to protect] me and my companions. And on one day they wished to kill me; but the time had not come yet; but they put me in irons, and carried off all we possessed. But on the fourteenth day the Lord released me from their power, and what was ours was restored to us through God and through the friends we had before secured.

You know how much I expended on the judges in the districts which I visited most frequently. For I think I paid them not less than the hire of fifteen men, that you might have the benefit of my presence, and that I might always enjoy you in the Lord. I do not regret it, nor is it sufficient for me. I still spend, and will still spend, for your souls.] Behold, I call God to witness on my soul that I do not lie, neither that you may have occasion, nor that I hope for honor from any of you; sufficient for me is the honor of truth. But I see that now in the present world I am greatly exalted by the Lord; and I was not worthy nor fit to be thus exalted, for I know that poverty and calamity are more suitable for me than riches and luxury. But even Christ the Lord was poor for us.

Truly, I, a poor and miserable creature, even if I wished for wealth, have it not; neither do I judge myself, because I daily expect either death, or treachery, or slavery, or an occasion of some kind or another. [But I fear none of these things, relying on the heavenly promise; for I have cast myself into the hands of the omnipotent God, who rules everywhere; as the prophet says: "Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee."

Behold, now I commend my soul to my most faithful God, whose mission I perform, notwithstanding my unworthiness; but because He does not accept persons, and has chosen me for this office, to be one of the least of His ministers. "What shall I render to Him for all the things that He hath rendered to me?" But what shall I say or promise to my Lord? For I see nothing unless He gives Himself to me; but He searches the heart and reins, because I ardently desire and am ready that He should give me to drink His cup, as He has permitted others to do who have loved Him. Wherefore may my Lord never permit me to lose His people whom He has gained in the ends of the earth. I pray God, therefore, that He may give me perseverance, and that He may vouchsafe to permit me to give Him faithful testimony for my God until my death. And if I have done anything good for my God, whom I love, I beseech Him to grant to me that with those proselytes and captives I may pour out my blood for His name, even if my body should be denied burial, and be miserably torn limb from limb by dogs or fierce beasts, or that the birds of heaven should devour it. I believe most certainly that if this should happen to me, I have gained both soul and body; for it is certain that we shall rise one day in the brightness of the sun—that is, the glory of Christ Jesus our Redeemer—as sons of God but as joint heirs with Christ, and to become conformable to His image.

For that sun which we see rises daily for us; but it will not rule or continue in its splendor for ever, and all who adore it shall suffer very miserably. But we who believe in and adore the true sun, Christ, who will never perish, neither he who shall do His will, but even as Christ shall abide for ever, who reigns with God the Father Almighty, and with the Holy Spirit, before the ages, and now, and for ever and ever. Amen.

Behold, again and again, I shall briefly declare the words of my confession. I testify in truth and in joy of heart, before God and His holy angels, that

I never had any occasion, except the Gospel and its promises, for returning to that people from whom I had before with difficulty escaped.]

But I beseech those who believe in and fear God, whoever may condescend to look into or receive this writing, which Patrick, the ignorant sinner, has written in Ireland, that no one may ever say, if I have ever done or demonstrated anything, however little, that it was my ignorance. But do you judge, and let it be believed firmly, that it was the gift of God. And this is my confession before I die.

