

MARCH 17, 2026 FATHER JOHN BERTAO

Some of you might be thinking, Wait a minute today is the 17th, we're celebrating, A special saint, Saint Patrick. It's also Lent, and yet here's a Portuguese priest, is he going to talk about Saint Patrick, or is he going to talk about Lent, or is he going to talk about... Well, how about maybe a compromise, and both. Just a little bit about Saint Patrick, just a little tiny bit. Even though, because we're still in Lent, and so trying to put both together. Just a few words.

Now, it's believed that Saint Patrick was born in the fifth century, of Britain-Roman parents. When he was 16, he was captured by pirates, and taken to Ireland. There, he was sold as a slave. His owner sent him to tend to his flocks of sheep, on the mountains. Patrick had very little food and clothing, and he took good care of the animals. In the rain, in the snow and ice. Patrick was so lonely, and here's the key, Patrick was so lonely on the hillside, that he often turned to prayer to Jesus and his Mother Mary. That was a really good thing to do. His life was hard and unfair, but Patrick's trust in God grew stronger all the time.

Six years later, when he escaped Ireland, Patrick decided to become a priest. And I'm sure you know much more about him than I could actually tell you in the few minutes that I've given. So, but if you could, if you could please, just look up his Confessio, which is a letter that he wrote about himself, where it explains everything that he did, and what happened in his life, and all the various things and how his is so honoured today by many parts of the world. And the addition, not the green stuff that we like to drink, and maybe even the green coffee.

But prayer was so key, so key in his life, and it should be key in our life as well. Prayer, and faith in God. You see, Saint Patrick teaches that being focused on Jesus's life is life-giving to us, no matter what we are

doing in life. Even when we think that Jesus is not listening, or paying attention to our needs.

For example, in today's Gospel, we are invited to reflect on the question, and I quote: "Is there anything holding you back from the Lord's healing power and transforming grace that can set you free to live in wholeness, joy, and peace with God? See, God had put into the heart of the prophet Ezekiel the vision of the river's living water, flowing from God's heavenly throne, to bring healing and restoration to his people." End quote.

So we begin to see the fulfilment of this restoration, taking place when the Lord announces the coming of God's kingdom, and performs signs and miracles in demonstration of the power of that kingdom. The kingdom of salvation, that Jesus brings to us. And one of the key signs or miracles, which John points out in the Gospel today, takes place in Jerusalem, when Jesus went up to the temple during the great festival feasts.

As Jesus approached the temple area, he stopped at the pool of Bethesda, which was very close by. Many Jews brought their sick relatives and friends to the pool. John tells us that: "A multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralysed were laid there on the pavement surrounding the pool." Imagine that. All these people waiting.

The pool, likely, was on the ritual baths used for the purification of people before they went into the temple to offer prayers and sacrifice. On certain occasions, especially when the waters were stirred, the lame and others with diseases were dipped into the pool, on the hope that they might be cured of their ailments.

The lame man that Jesus stopped to speak with had been paralysed for 38 years. 38 years. That's a lifetime for some people. He felt helpless,

because he had no friends to help him bathe in the purifying water of the pool. Despite his many years of unanswered prayer, he still waited by the pool in the hope that help might come his way. And it did, as we hear in the Gospel today.

Jesus offered this incurable man not only the prospect to help, but to also healing him as well. Jesus first awakened, he first awakened, the faith in him that brought him to life, physically and spiritually speaking. Just like Saint Patrick. Jesus then ordered him to "Get up, and walk." Now the lame man had put his newfound faith into action. He decided to take the Lord at his word, and immediately stood up, and began to walk freely.

Are you suffering physically or otherwise? How much do you focus outside of yourself, outside of suffering, and give yourself to the healing power of Jesus? Perhaps like Saint Patrick and this man. The Lord Jesus approaches each one of us with the same probing question, and I quote: "Do you really want to be healed? To be forgiven? To be set free from guilt and sin, from uncontrollable anger and other disordered passions, from the hurtful desires, or maybe even addictions?"

The first essential step towards freedom then, and healing, is the desire to change. Inwardly, and outwardly. If you are content to stay as you are, then no amount of coaxing will change you. The Lord will not refuse anyone who sincerely asks for his pardon. Merely just ask for mercy and healing. It's up to each one of us to do so, to welcome the life-changing healing that we desire, that Jesus is prepared to give to each one of us.

And so, I close with a prayer. Lord Jesus, put into my hear the burning desire to be changed, and transformed in your way of holiness. Let your Holy Spirit purify my heart, and renew me in fervent love and desire to

do whatever is pleasing to you, and to refuse whatever is contrary to your divine will. Amen.