

The Third Week of Lent

THE COLLECT

"We beseech thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty, to be our defence against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 25: THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

On this feast day, we remember the holy moment recorded in Luke 1:26-38, when the angel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary that she is "highly favored" and will be the bearer of the Christ. The feast day is exactly nine months before the Nativity on December 25th. While the first authentic records of "Lady Day" are in the mid-8th century, it may have been celebrated at least since the late 4th century. Here is an excerpt from St. Cyril of Alexandria, preached at the council of Ephesus in 431:

"We hail you, O mysterious and Holy Trinity who has gathered us together in council in this church of Holy Mary, the God-bearer. We hail you, Mary, the God-bearer, sacred treasure of all the universe, the star which never sets, the crown of virginity, the scepter of true law, a temple which cannot be destroyed, the dwelling place of one who cannot be contained. O Mother and Virgin, we hail you for the sake of the one whom the holy Gospels call 'blessed,' the one who 'comes in the name of the Lord.'"

TUESDAY, MARCH 26: SAINT PATRICK (TRANSFERRED FROM MARCH 17)

Born around 390 on the northwest coast of Britain, St. Patrick's father was a deacon and his grandfather had been a priest, but Patrick paid no attention to the Christian faith. This changed when he was around 13 or 14 and he was carried away as a slave to Ireland. He lived as a shepherd and he writes in his confession, "Constantly I used to pray in the daytime, my love of God and fear of God increased more and more, and my faith grew and my spirit was stirred up, so that in a single day I said as many as a hundred prayers and at night nearly as many..." After six years, Patrick escaped and found his way back to his family. Then he was trained as a priest and was influenced by Martin of Tours' monasticism. When he was around forty, he felt called to return to Ireland as a bishop. He walked all of Ireland, evangelizing the Irish people and legends abound about his life and ministry. He died on March 17th around 461. Fr. John-Julian says of St. Patrick:

"The fact is that the Patrick we know from history is far more attractive than the semi-divine, peculiar miracle worker of the legends. He is a rustic, hardy, no-nonsense, faithful laborer in a unique and difficult corner of the Lord's vineyard, worthy of deep admiration and imitation. The Church he and his followers founded was the same Celtic Church whose bishops met Saint Augustine when he arrived at Canterbury a hundred and thirty years later unaware that there was already a Christian Church in the British Isles."

FRIDAY, MARCH 29: BLESSED JOHN KEBLE

Born in 1792, the son of a faithful priest, John Keble lived at a time when it's difficult for us to grasp how cold and desolate the English church had become. Brilliant intellectually, he advanced quickly and became a Fellow at Oriel College, Oxford, at age 19. His collection of poems, *The Christian Year*, won him great praise in 1827 and he became Professor of Poetry in 1831. In July 14, 1833, he preached a sermon called "On National Apostasy," which launched the Oxford Movement. After this, in 1836, he married and became a parish priest near Winchester until he died in 1866. During this time, he was a quiet, faithful presence within the Oxford Movement. In his famous sermon, "On National Apostasy," he speaks of the importance of ordinary, faithful lives in reviving the Church:

"The surest way to uphold or restore our endangered Church, will be for each of her anxious children, in his own place and station, to resign himself more thoroughly to his God and Savior in those duties, public and private, which are not immediately affected by the emergencies of the moment: the daily and hourly duties, I mean, of piety, purity, charity and justice."

