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Retreat Ministry • Parish Missions

"Come away by yourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile!..." Mark 6:31
Are you ready to accept the invitation?

The Breastplate of St. Patrick *A Reflection on Luke 6:36-38*

*"I arise today through the mighty strength of the Trinity....
Christ to shield me today."
from The Breastplate of St. Patrick,
attributed to St. Patrick, Apostle of Ireland (390-469 C.E.)*

Patrick is not only my patron saint; he is also a model for the ministry God has given me. He traveled all over Ireland preaching the Gospel; I travel all over this country (and, occasionally, beyond) doing the same. My preaching is usually in the context of a retreat, parish mission, or day of prayer. And, like Patrick, I too rely upon (as The Breastplate says):

*God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's shield to protect me....*

For his fifth-century audience, Patrick's message was both novel and challenging: a call to leave their pagan ways and be converted to the Gospel. For my twenty-first-century audience, the message is usually not new; but is every bit as challenging, especially when we recognize that conversion is not a once-and-for-all event. Rather, conversion is a life-long journey, calling us to keep our minds and hearts open to the full import of Jesus' message – which is always beyond what we have yet grasped.

Today's Gospel (*Lk. 6:36-38*) points out, uncomfortably so, how much further I have yet to go on that journey. It contains some of the very few absolutes Jesus ever gave those who would follow him: Be merciful. Stop judging. Stop condemning. Forgive.

Has there been a day on which I have not failed in those very ways? That is one reason why a prayer I offer every morning are the first words of The Breastplate (in this two-fold translation, so that I might better remember the message):

*I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity.
I bind unto myself the strong presence of Father, Son and Spirit.*

Perhaps that prayer may help me be a bit more converted today – and perhaps it might do the same for you.

Patrick Foley