March 17: St Patrick (Lk 10:1-12, 17-20)

**SOURCE OF JOY AND PEACE**

Peace and joy are surely difficult to achieve. We would all like to be more joyful and to be at peace a lot more than we are. But we can’t say that we haven’t been told how to achieve peace and joy. Perhaps, it sounds so unlike what we expected that we ignore the message.

Jesus had a formula for peace and joy, and he taught it to his followers early in the time that he spent with them. It sounds contradictory, irresponsible, and even crazy, but those who have tried it assure us that we can’t understand it until we have tried it.

He sent them off on their first missionary trip to prepare the villages for his own arrival. He sent them out defenceless, with no security whatever, no money, no food, with inadequate clothing, but single-minded in their mission to the people. He said, “Call down peace on their homes and accept their welcome if they offer you any.”

It was an unpromising formula for a joyful and peaceful life, but they tried it and “they came back rejoicing.” They discovered that they had extraordinary power over evil, and that they could cope with adverse conditions, and that they received a wholehearted welcome from peace-loving people.

But Jesus warned them at once, “Don’t rejoice merely over your favourable reception this time, or even over your God-given power to cope with adversity, but rejoice because you belong to me and you share the burden of my life and work. That’s the only source of genuine joy and peace.”

Jesus assures us also, that if we throw in our lot with him and trust him, we will find a peace of mind and heart in him alone that nothing can take away. The peace that he gives us is a peace that fears nothing, that finds in every situation a reason for joy and thanks, even when we feel separated from him, and when he sends us out with no material security. We won’t always be well received, and some adversities may overwhelm us.

Peace, as Jesus understands it, takes in both material and spiritual blessings, not only and not always health of body and mind, but also and more important, joyful freedom of the spirit that only the Son of God and our Saviour can bring us. He said, “My own peace I give you, a peace that the world cannot give, this is my gift to you” (John 14:27).

This is the kind of peace that St Patrick brought to the people of Ireland. You would hardly think so, given the turbulent history of the Irish since St Patrick’s day. But it was precisely in those troubled times and up to the present day that those Irish who clung to their faith in Jesus Christ have found joy and peace even in hardships and in the worst of times.

To live the Christian life as they have done, and to experience the peace and joy that the world cannot give or take away, is to go out to others like a lamb among wolves, to abandon the secure and the customary if these things hinder us, even in our comfortable church and religion, and to commit ourselves single-mindedly to seeking what is true and just in God’s sight.

It is truly a question of setting our hearts on God’s kingdom first, of throwing in our lot with Jesus, of accepting to lose our life if necessary, in order to enjoy the peace of Jesus Christ, God’s Son and our Saviour.

St Patrick is a model of Christian life. He led the Irish people to Jesus, the source of true peace and joy. Many of us in Australia thank God for St Patrick and for our faithful Irish forebears who have led us to the same unfailing source of joy and peace.