March 17th: Memorial of Saint Patrick, bishop (Patron Saint of Ireland)

Gospel text (*Lk* 10:1-12.17-20): At that time the Lord appointed seventy-two others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. He said to them, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. Into whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this household.' If a peaceful person lives there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Stay in the same house and eat and drink what is offered to you, for the laborer deserves his payment. Do not move about from one house to another. Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God is at hand for you.' Whatever town you enter and they do not receive you, go out into the streets and say, 'The dust of your town that clings to our feet, even that we shake off against you.' Yet know this: the kingdom of God is at hand. I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom on that day than for that town."

The seventy-two returned rejoicing, and said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name." Jesus said, "I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. Behold, I have given you the power to 'tread upon serpents' and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

"The Lord appointed seventy-two others"

Fr. Gavan JENNINGS
(Dublín, Ireland)

Today, we celebrate the great fifth century "Apostle of Ireland", Saint Patrick —a saint who is revered not only in the country to which he brought the Catholic Faith, but also in those many countries throughout the world which were in turn, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, evangelized in large part by Irish

emigrants and missionaries.

In the Gospel for his feast we are told how Jesus “appointed seventy-two others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit” (Lk 10:1). In some ways it is ironic that this is the passage selected for the feast day of a saint who, almost uniquely among the great missionary saints, single-handedly converted a whole nation from paganism to the Catholic Faith. He first came to Ireland as a captive teenage slave from Roman Britain, and he came very much alone; some years later, following priestly and episcopal ordination, he returned to the people that had enslaved him, deeply desiring to capture them for Christ, and once again he came completely alone.

Again it might appear ironic that today's Gospel contains Jesus' words: “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few” (Lk 10:2) as if there could be no harvesting without many laborers, as if the evangelization of the world were a “numbers' game”. But perhaps by the “fewness” of the laborers Jesus may also be referring to a personal lack of sanctity: Christ doesn't require multitudes to convert the world, he requires saints. Even one saint can convert a whole nation as we witness today. Pope Francis has reminded us that it is those men and women whose hearts are filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit —as Patrick's was— who will begin a “new chapter of evangelization full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction!”

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “I give thanks to my God tirelessly who kept me faithful in the day of trial, so that today I offer sacrifice to him confidently, the living sacrifice of my life to Christ” (Saint Patrick)

- “Patrick was a witness to Jesus Christ. It is said that he lit, for the first time in Ireland, the Paschal Fire, so that the light of Christ might shine forth on all of Ireland in the love of the one Jesus Christ.” (Saint John Paul II)

- “(...) The mission to baptize, and so the sacramental mission, is implied in the mission to evangelize, because the sacrament is prepared for by the word of God and by the faith which is assent to this word.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nº 1122)