



Capitol Comments:

St. Patrick: An Unidentified Human Trafficking Victim

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As we celebrate Saint Patrick's Day this year you will hear about St. Patrick bringing Christianity to Ireland. You may hear tales of snakes, shamrocks, and the luck of the Irish, although Saint Patrick wasn't Irish. You will probably not hear that St. Patrick was a human trafficking victim who then devoted his life to saving his captors. But he was.

The son of a Roman-British army officer, St. Patrick was born in Scotland. He and several other boys were kidnapped by Irish pirates in South Wales. After spending six years enslaved in Ireland, he was inspired by a dream in which God told him to escape. He escaped and went to France to study for the priesthood. Eventually, he was named a Bishop, but his heart called him to go back to Ireland and minister to his captors. The Pope sent him to Ireland to preach the Gospel, converting druids and traffickers. In his Confession he writes about his sadness at the converts he baptized being captured and enslaved, "I am at a loss to know whether to weep more for those they [the traffickers] killed or for those they captured: or indeed for these men themselves whom the devil has taken for his slaves." He was arrested many more times as a Bishop and managed to escape each time.

The thousands of human trafficking victims in Texas also pray for escape and need our help to do so. Victims of human trafficking are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. "Texas is considered a major hub for human trafficking into the U.S. According to recent estimates, one out of every five U.S. trafficking victims travels through Texas along Interstate 10. Nearly 20 percent of human trafficking victims found nationwide have been in Texas." (The Texas Response to Human Trafficking, Office of the Attorney General, Report to the 81st Legislature)

During the last legislative session the Texas Legislature passed HB 4009, a bill that creates an assistance program for domestic victims of trafficking, including children, to help them access necessary services. The Texas Catholic Conference (TCC) supported this bill, reiterating that human trafficking directly affronts the dignity of the victims' lives. But more is needed. In the 2011 legislative session the TCC will look for legislative initiatives to end human trafficking, particularly efforts to train law enforcement and service providers in victim identification.

There are victims among us and we don't recognize the signs of their enslavement, much like so many of us were not aware of St. Patrick's trafficking history. If you are a victim or suspect someone you know is a victim of human trafficking, call the national hotline at 1-888-3737-888 to get help.

St. Patrick may be known most for bringing Christianity to Ireland, but he also spent his life as a Bishop seeking to end trafficking. As we work to this modern-day slavery, we seek the intercession of St. Patrick for all trafficking victims. St. Patrick, Pray for us.

The history of St. Patrick taken from his confession, "The Confession of Saint Patrick" translated by John Skinner.