

The saint behind the green suds

With a Bible or a beer, be sure to celebrate 'Irish Saul' Sunday

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
Staff Writer

Every March 17, pubs across North America serve Guinness and Irish stew, play Celtic music and — Irish or not — have a big party.

It may just be the world's rowdiest religious holiday.

"St. Patrick's is a good day to drink green beer," Tristine Doherty said. "That's all it is in Canada."

Ms Doherty, who came to Canada from Ireland when she was 10, said March 17 is considered a holy day in her homeland.

But it isn't celebrated where she comes from, Telmore, which she described as a "pagan" area in the northern part of the country.

Nonetheless, Ms Doherty, who returns to Ireland every year, was happy to discuss the festival in the decidedly secular atmosphere of an Irish pub in Vaughan.

While Canada commonly associates green beer with the feast day of Ireland's patron saint, the shamrock is the dominant symbol on the other side of the Atlantic.

What many Canadians don't know is the three-leafed clover is a religious symbol associated with St. Patrick, who used it to illustrate the Holy Trinity.

Mark Rogers, who is of Irish descent, lamented St. Patrick's Day has become a secular holiday just like any other in this country.

Mr. Rogers, who noted his wife wakes up early every morning to read the Bible, said he knew little about the story of St. Patrick, who

suffered repeated persecution in trying to bring Christianity to the masses.

"He's the Irish Saul," Mr. Rogers said, referring to St. Paul, who also was persecuted for his Christian beliefs.

"I know he was a good guy and kicked the snakes out of Ireland, but that's all I could tell you."

"I know a bunch of ... people and for them, St. Patrick's Day is just an excuse to get drilled to the eyeballs."

Patrick Brady of Richmond Hill said he had a "fair idea" about what St. Patrick's Day is all about.

He was born in Dublin and lived in Ireland until about a year ago.

Most Irish citizens keep the day holy, Mr. Brady said, but that doesn't stop many of them from downing a few pints

every March 17.

Even those who give up alcohol for Lent drink on that day, he said.

"It's an excuse to drink more beer — not that we need an excuse," he remarked.

"It's an excuse for everyone across the world to be Irish. It's a day where the world celebrates."

Debbie Kluwak of Richmond Hill said it's a shame few people seem to know the story of St. Patrick and the meaning of his day.

"I knew we celebrated on March 17 because that's the day he died," she said.

"People forget what it really is. I think it's sad. I think anything like that is sad."

'I know he was a good guy and kicked the snakes out of Ireland, but that's all I could tell you. I know a bunch of ... people, and for them, St. Patrick's Day is just an excuse to get drilled to the eyeballs.'



STAFF PHOTOS/MIKE BARRETT



Religious day or excuse to party? Looks like the latter, judging by these folks tuning up for Sunday's St. Patrick's Day celebrations. TOP: Preparing for the big event are Pauline Ashmore (left), owner of the Emerald Isle in downtown Stouffville, and barmaid Vanessa Buttery. ABOVE: From front, Duchess of Markham patrons Ken Suddes, Chrissy Maude, Mike Arbour, Janet Beacham, Jeremy Teasdale and owner Mike Thompson keep bartender Resh Prashad busy.

St. Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland

Though most people associate his feast day with little more than the shamrock, there's much more to the devoted Christian who was St. Patrick.

Born in Wales around 385 AD, the boy who eventually became Ireland's patron saint was first known as Maewyn and was a pagan until he was 16.

Irish marauders sold him into slavery and, as a teen, he came to know God during six years of captivity.

He escaped to Gaul, where he studied in a monastery for 12 years.

During that time, he felt a calling to convert pagans to Christianity, so he established monasteries and churches throughout Ireland.

The success Patrick experienced in his endeavour angered the Celtic druids and he was arrested several times.

He escaped on each of those occasions and went on to carry out his mission for 30 years.

He retired to County Down and died in AD 461, March 17 — which millions have commemorated as St. Patrick's Day ever since.

Patrick had used one of the symbols people associate with him, the shamrock, as a metaphor for the Holy Trinity.

The three-leafed clover helped people understand the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could all exist as separate elements of the same entity.

People originally celebrated it as a Roman Catholic holy day, but St. Patrick's Day has now evolved into a secular event.

— Gianni Colavecchia

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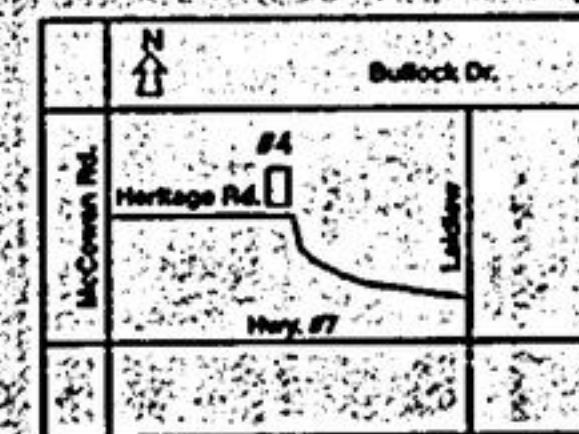


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