

Homily of Archbishop Blase J. Cupich
Mass for the Celebration of St. Patrick's Day
"Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the Easter Rising"
Old St. Patrick's, Chicago
March 12, 2016

Fr. Hurley, you pay this full-blooded Croatian, a singular honor by inviting me to preside at the Mass to begin our city's celebration of St. Patrick's Day.

I learned early on in my ministry as a priest that the Irish are not all that familiar with Croatians, as shocking as that may be. Years ago when I was serving as a bishop's secretary, I was asked to get another bishop on the phone. The housekeeper answered the phone in a strong brogue. I asked, "Is the bishop available." "And who would be callin'?" she insisted. "This is Father Cupich," I replied. "And how would you spell that," she demanded. "C U P I C H," I offered. With a laugh in her voice, she blurted out: "Isn't that a funny name?"

Now you have to realize that when all of this took place I was young and lacking in restraint, and so I couldn't let that go by. "Well, don't trouble yourself deary," I explained. "We shortened it; it used to be O' Cupich." She reported me to her boss, wanting to know who that cheeky lad was.

Happily this Croatian's encounters with the sons and daughters of the Emerald Isle have only improved since then. And, I would have to say, today is a highlight in my years of friendships with the Irish. These are friendships we all share, making us all a little bit Irish, today. It is good to be with you.

The scripture texts chosen for today, remind us that the Bible is replete with references of how God's handiwork of creation unfolds organically, progressing step by step in an ordered and coherent way. We are all familiar with the story in Genesis, which recounts how creation unfolds. It is not capricious, but builds up day after day. This morning we hear the prophet Isaiah borrowing that image from the natural world to offer a vision about the restoration of society and the civic order to a people alienated from each other and their God. It is a restoration offered to those open to receiving God's spirit.

"In those days: The spirit from on high will be poured out on us." The desert will give way to an orchard of justice and the orchard of justice will grow into a forest of peace, calm and security. The message is clear. The growth and preservation of human civilization, culture and the social order requires a discipline, a pacing, a collaboration and coordination involving everyone. Growth cannot be forced. It cannot be advanced by favoring some over others, including some and excluding others. It cannot be left to chance, but it has to be intentional, ordered and purposeful in bringing about social solidarity.

Modern science tells us that the growth of any living organism has to be organic and coordinated. Whenever it is not and cells grow in ways isolated from the body, they begin to mutate in a self-serving and self-preserving way. We call that cancer. So, too, in the organism of

human society. When the common good of all is not the aim of society's growth, whether that be in the economy, education, civil rights or civic participation, a cancer grows that damages the whole social body.

This year's St. Patrick's celebration, which marks the 100th anniversary of the Easter Rising in Ireland, brings that message home so very forcefully. On Easter Monday, 1916, a group of Irish nationalists proclaimed the establishment of the Irish Republic, rebelling against British rule. In response, British troops were sent in and the violence resulted in the death and injury of more than 2000 citizens and the destruction of much of the Dublin city center. How did this happen? What were the causes? A segment of society was told they didn't matter, and were treated as sub-human, "a lower class" not only economically but socially to be excluded from the body politic. Social cohesion wore thin in a system corrupted by inequality, favoring the powerful and wealthy, their self-promotion and preservation to the exclusion of the weak and voiceless. The result: many people lost hope, solidarity vanished, hearts hardened and society ended up becoming infected by a cancer that harmed all.

William Butler Yeats described the situation well in his poem Easter, 1916:

*Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.*

In the Gospel text from the evangelist John, Jesus speaks to a community of disciples that he prays will live united, and in solidarity. He speaks of the importance of friendship for remaining together. They are not just to be acquaintances but friends.

Friendships too develop naturally; they are relationships that grow organically. They take time, discipline, mutual respect and dialogue. They don't just happen. They take work and they grow in ordered sequence. We meet someone. We see something in them that we like and they see something they like about us. In friendships we reveal something about ourselves that we may not have appreciated. Friendships transcend differences of opinion and conflicts, bring comfort in trial and they grow in moments of forgiveness and failing. Jesus understood all of this as he invited his disciples to be his friends and friends of one another so that the community would live united, and in solidarity. For their community to remain united, they needed to befriend one another.

While Jesus aims his remarks about friendship at a community of faith, all human communities, and society at large understand the value of friendships for society. In fact, centuries ago, Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, noted that friendships are needed for the growth of civilization. He remarked that while friendships, like justice, are not found in tyrannies, they are proper to democracies, "because the citizens, being equal, have much in common."

We seem to have lost the value of friendship in our social relationships. Our nation seems to have lost a sense of the importance of cultivating friendships as fellow citizens who, being equal, share much in common. Instead, our politics and public discourse are often marked by enmity and animosity. There is an overly competitive character that defines how we relate to one

another, emphasizing what divides us rather than what we share in common. And because we do not value growing together, a cancer is developing that threatens to harm us all. Positions harden, progress is stalled, and it is becoming clear that the body politic is nearing the limits of how much suffering it can endure.

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Is it not time to remember that we are a democracy and that in being equal we have so much in common? Can we recapture the value of friendship as fellow citizens? Is that not what we should all pray for this day, as we call on the spirit of God promised by the prophet?

We are given a special grace this morning to reflect on all of this in a church that has come to symbolize how Chicagoans have learned the value of friendships that transcend prejudice, tragedy and differences. Old St. Patrick's was founded 170 years ago in 1846, by Irish immigrants not welcome elsewhere. The oldest continually-used church and public building in Chicago, it survived the Great Chicago Fire in 1871.

Yet, in spite of their past sufferings, succeeding generations of Irish immigrant descendants have welcomed Chicagoans, Catholic and others, to Old St. Pat's to share common prayer, hopes and dreams. As a result, Old St. Pat's stands as a tall reminder that Chicago owes its greatness precisely to its historic ability to weave the diverse cultural identities of the many immigrant communities who have journeyed here into a unified social fabric. In this history Chicago became a series of orchards each reflecting a rich culture, which in turn became a forest in its unity and strength. The source of this unity and strength has always resided in the city's thirst for the very justice and social peace which Isaiah points as a deep reflection of the grace of God.

In a special way today we honor how that grace of God has worked in the Irish community, making it a central element of this thirst for justice and peace in the building up of our city.

On the occasion of St. Patrick's day, as Chicagoans, as believers, we are invited to be open to the spirit of God moving us to take up the work of restoration, a restoration that comes in building friendships, in stages, with the discipline and with a commitment to dialogue, a commitment to walk together step by step as equals who, while not always agreeing with each other, have so much in common. The Jubilee of Mercy, which Pope Francis has called, can be that fresh start we need to step back, reflect on what we all share in common, and reach out to each other with works of mercy that foster friendship and reconciliation and open up new horizons for us to live together as children of the one Father. In fact, it is in the shared aspiration as a people who know the value of friendship, that we, no matter our heritage or our funny names, can gather as friends in this sacred space and wish each other a Happy St. Patrick's Day.

First Reading: Isaiah 32:15-18

In those days: The spirit from on high will be poured out on us. Then will the desert become an orchard and the orchard be regarded as a forest. Right will dwell in the desert and justice abide in the orchard. Justice will bring about peace; right will produce calm and security. My people will live in peaceful country, in secure dwellings and quiet resting places.

John 15:9-17

As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

I have told you this that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another.