

spring un-holidays

What in the world is St. Patty's Day all about, anyway? Do you know? I didn't.

Saint Patrick was a monk and missionary in Ireland in the fourth century. Legend has it that he used the shamrock as an object lesson for teaching the truth of the Trinity, and that he drove all the snakes off the Emerald Isle. History tells us that he was responsible for much of the growth of Christianity in Ireland, and that the structures he put in place for the Celtic churches lasted for centuries after his death. His "feast day" is, of course, March 17.

Now let me be clear here. I'm a Baptist. I care little for the "saints" or their feast days or the classical traditions of the "mainline" versions Christianity. But I do notice a thing or two now and then.

What I notice about St. Patty's Day is that in America, a day that is supposed to be a celebration of Irish Christianity is instead a celebration of Irish drunkenness. Our irreverent, skeptical, radically egalitarian ("nobody is better than anybody") mindset often turns what is high and worthy into something low and worthless – in the name of keeping everybody equal.

So Saint Patrick's Day, what is supposed to be a holy day, is for us a drunken revel. Fat Tuesday, what should be a final feast before the rigors of Lent, is an immoral free-for-all. And Easter itself is just an excuse to buy chocolate.

All right. So, what? I'm usually plenty loud in my complaints about turning man-made traditions into sacred cows. So when did I get so worried about all these human holidays?

Well, I guess that happened when I noticed how we Americans seem to take every opportunity we can find to indulge our every whim. We even take otherwise sacred times and turn them into opportunities to throw aside all self-restraint. We seem to be gripped by some sort of driving impulse to get soused. It's a madness, or a despair, or an insanity, and it's pitiful to behold.

Many of us see this about our beloved land, and pity is precisely what we're moved to. We pity our pitiful country, and well, we should.

We feel a great sadness for a people who seem to have no concept of the beauty of holiness, and no appreciation of the pleasures of godliness. Most of their delights, it seems, are bought in a package store, or scammed for free in chance encounters and fleeting relationships.

You see, when it comes down to it, people act like they're lost because they are. They have no spiritual foundation, and no moral compass. Even their holidays ("holy days," originally) are unholy days, because every day is a day without holiness. Christian compassion calls us to love them, to pity them, and to tell them the truth about God, about holiness, about sin, about forgiveness, and about their true reason for even being at all.

Pray to God, and say to man, that every day is a holy day / holiday, a day full of joy in Jesus and satisfaction in his Spirit.

© Christopher Gudmundsson, 2005