



You never know who God is going to bring into your life. This past week I had an amazing experience of God while waiting for my dinner.

“Iced tea, please.” I requested with a genuine tone.

“You guys goin’ to get ripped on Friday?” the waiter asked me (and my friends).

“I’m sorry?” I asked a little confused and more than a little intrigued.

“You know, are you guys gonna get lit up to celebrate Saint Patrick’s day this Friday?” he asked again, (obviously assuming that because we were young adults that binge drinking and public drunkenness must be our favorite past time...)

“Um...no.” I replied with a stern and disapproving but gentle, non-judgmental tone.

“Why not, are you guys like recovering alcoholics or something?” he pushed, searching for an answer as to why we would not choose to inebriate ourselves on the altar of public opinion or conformity.

“What’s your name?” I asked.

“Thomas” he replied.

“Thomas, I have to ask you a question. You obviously plan to get wasted on Friday to “celebrate”. Why is getting drunk necessary? I don’t want to sound prudish, but I just don’t understand why you consider that the ultimate sign of your freedom as a young adult?”

His facial expression showed how perplexed he was. His body language did little to disguise his defensiveness.

“What nationality are you?” he asked me (in an odd retort).

“I’m Irish and German.” I replied.

“Oh well, you see, I’m 100% Irish, so you wouldn’t understand. Drinking is a part of our heritage, and only being half Irish you wouldn’t understand the significance of St. Patty’s Day. It’s how our

ancestors celebrated and it's been passed down from generation to generation. Maybe the Irish in your family weren't proud of their heritage, but my family is..." His attempt to justify his intention to binge drink was obvious, but his assault on our family pride in our heritage was unfounded and ignorant.

I had planned to let his comments go, but I could not...for he would undoubtedly spin the same inane dribble on another unsuspecting table later in the day, and he needed a little dose of reality.

"Hey Thomas, I don't know how to break this to you, but getting hammered doesn't demonstrate your freedom, it relinquishes it. Further, saying that your ancestors celebrated their Irish heritage by getting wasted is unfounded and a sad commentary about your family tree. Alcoholism, like any addiction, is not an exercise of freedom, it is an exercise of slavery. Ironically, the very slavery that your ancestors were probably fighting in Ireland prior to the arrival of Saint Patrick." His face went white. He was confused, upset and grew a little angry (but not too angry, because he was still working for a tip).

"Well, that's your version, but I know my Irish history" he replied, clinging to the rationalization that would leave him drunken and guilt free.

"Oh, and Thomas, one more thing...Saint Patrick wasn't Irish...at all" I said with a gentle but assured humility.

That was it. You would have thought I pulled his still beating heart out of his Kelly-green covered chest and smashed right in front of his (no longer) "smiling" Irish eyes.

I would have been fine letting it go, but after his last comments, I felt the need to set straight my belligerent, well-intentioned new friend who was way long on ego and bit short on actual knowledge.

"Saint Patrick was Welsh-Italian. Most agree, too, that there weren't any actual snakes in the country. That is a myth. He wasn't the first Christian missionary sent to Ireland, either, that was Saint Palladius. Lastly, Saint Patrick is not only the patron saint of Ireland, but also of Nigeria. He spoke out against slavery, pagan worship and was a champion of women's rights in a time when people treated them as objects (not unlike today). He stood for Jesus Christ, spoke out against pagan influences and the debauched lifestyles that were leading countless masses into sin – including drunkenness, idolatry, witchcraft, and sexual sins. In short, Saint Patrick would be rolling over in his grave if he felt that millions every year 'celebrated' his life in the ways that you are suggesting we do."

Thomas had nothing to say. He had forgotten his argument. He had forgotten his heritage. He had forgotten our order (it took forever to get our food).

"I understand that you like getting wasted and see it as the ultimate exercise of young freedom, I used to think that way, too. The reality, though, is that it's a lie. Freedom is not 'doing whatever you want'. Freedom is the capacity to love and to do what is right. Alcohol, like any drug, enslaves the human person. Saint Patrick went to Ireland to free the slaves with the Gospel. Those temptations were the 'snakes' that were killing the masses. I don't judge you, brother, and I don't want to come off as 'holier than thou' or any of that garbage. I genuinely want you to know that. God has bigger plans for you than you do for yourself. Those plans will be hard to see and hear if you're hiding behind a drunken stooper for the most formative years of your life. Do what you will do, and know



Saint Patrick, an Irish Saint?

that I'll be praying for you this Friday. I pray that you choose wisely."

Thomas disappeared to the kitchen. You could see he was thinking a great deal. You could tell that what started as small talk turned into far more. The conversation had done more than challenge his mind, the words we exchanged – two strangers that were now acquaintances, were challenging his heart.

Later on in the meal, when the check came, something unexpected happened. My new brother in Christ, Thomas, thanked me.

"I saw your crucifix. I'm assuming you're Catholic. I was raised Catholic but I haven't been to church in a long time, since I moved out of my parent's house. No one has really talked to me like that since my grandma died. Where did you learn so much about the faith?" He inquired.

"Here and there" I replied. "Lemme give you a website." (pointing him to Lifeteen.com)

"I'm still going out on Saint Patrick's day, you know" he admitted.

"I figured" I replied with an appreciation for his honesty.

"Maybe I won't drink too much" he offered.

"Maybe you won't drink at all..." I urged with more belief in him than he has in himself.

"What is the point in that?" He asked.

"To celebrate the life of a man who put God's will before his own wants, and the salvation of an entire nation ahead of his own bodily desires. Basically, to truly honor Saint Patrick." I suggested.

"What's your name?" he asked me.

"Mark Joseph Hart" I replied. In fact, "Thomas" was my Confirmation name.

"What's yours?" I asked back.

"Thomas Patrick..." he replied.

"Well Thomas, it was a pleasure. I'll be praying that Saint Patrick makes you uncomfortable this Friday." I said jokingly.

"He already has..." Thomas replied honestly.

As we left and I headed to my car I had to grin. Over 1500 years later, Saint Patrick's life is still converting hearts. And in the middle of a restaurant, Thomas Patrick had an experience of God... Thomas (the doubter) is no match for Patrick (the snake charmer).

God is good.

Happy Saint Patrick's Day.

Mark Hart



My childhood plan was to be a jedi. My teenage plan was to be on Saturday Night Live. God's plan was to have me in ministry. God won - and I'm glad He did.