

Pastor's Corner:

January 6, 2011

" St. Munchin"

January 2nd is the feast of St. Munchin. Little is known of his life. The Vatican's official list of saints says that he died in the seventh century. He was probably born in the western part of Ireland with a different name, but when he joined a monastery, they named him Munchin, or "little monk." He was probably short. He must have known the scriptures well, but we have no single word that he wrote, no quotations of anything he said. He joined the abbey of Mungret, founded a century earlier by Saint Patrick. Two of his sisters, Rose and Lelia, had convents nearby. In those days, an Irish monastery was not only a religious center, but also a kind of township, a school, and a hotel. Some monks came and went, but others stayed, especially the teachers; Munchin may have been one of those. He had a great respect for women and promoted their education, especially those in religious life, so it is said. When he took charge of his community, nearby tribal rulers were suspicious of any leader of a growing monastery and city, but his handling of them earned him the name Munchin the Wise. Near the end of his life, like other monks, he occasionally travelled in search of what they called the place of resurrection, a place of rest, where he could prepare for death. Munchin obtained land by the Shannon River from the local king; he moved into a simple hut, had a small chapel, and drew a few other monks to a simpler life than the bustling monastery Mungret had become. Those huts have long been lost under the modern city of Limerick. We know little about Munchin's life, but that is actually a tribute to a monk who devoted his life to work and prayer, and took care of local needs, while waiting for God to call him home.

This year Munchin's feast coincided with our celebration of the Epiphany, and I cannot think of two more different celebrations. The Epiphany is about big news. A child has been born, a star hangs in the sky, Herod is nervous, and magi are traveling with gifts for a newborn king. Even Psalm 72 that we sing that day sounds global; other kings pay homage to Israel's king, coming from places near modern day Spain, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia. Even as an infant, Jesus affected world events.

We know more about him than we do of any of his contemporaries. We know almost nothing about St. Munchin. All of you know whenever you tell a Catholic from somewhere else the name of your parish, they say, "Saint Who?" People sometimes say to me, "Father, I didn't even know there was a Saint Munchkin." "There's not," I tell them. "It's Munchin." I tell them he's the patron saint of snack food; he's not, but at least they'll remember it the next time.

Even though there are only two parishes on earth named for Saint Munchin, one in Limerick and one in Cameron, missionaries brought his name to western Australia, where there is still a St. Munchin Catholic School, and thanks to Sr. Rita Tofflemire who grew up in Cameron, a little mission church in Tanzania in East Africa is going up with the name of St. Munchin. A woodcarver from their main parish, Mary of Fatima, made us a statue of St. Munchin, which we have in the corner of the church in Cameron.

Although these two observances are very different, one about Jesus, whom everybody knows, and one about Munchin, whom very few know, they both proclaim this message: If you live the life God intended for you from the moment you were born, you will have a positive influence on the people around you, and more importantly, you will help every nation on earth to adore the Lord.

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