

I'm honored to be here preaching at the feast of St. Brigid of Kildare, this great Irish saint. Have you ever read about her?

Brigid (also known as Bridget or Bride) of Kildare was born around 450 into a Druid family. At an early age, she decided to become a Christian, and she eventually took vows as a nun. Together with a group of other women, she established a nunnery at Kildare (meaning, Church of the Oak). She was later joined by a community of monks led by Conlaed. Kildare had formerly been a pagan shrine where a sacred fire was kept perpetually burning, and Bridget and her nuns, instead of stamping out the fire, kept it going but gave it a Christian interpretation. Bridget as an abbess participated in several Irish councils, and her influence on the policies of the Church in Ireland was considerable.

Another interesting story about St. Brigid is related to the cross we know as “St. Brigid's Cross”. During one of her travels, St. Brigid went to visit a dying pagan chieftan. As she sat near his bed, she picked up some rushes on the floor and began weaving a Cross. He asked her about what she was doing and, in explaining, she told him about Christ and the meaning of the Cross. He believed and was baptized.

Now, I've never been to Ireland, let alone to pre-Christian 4th Century Ireland. The closest I've ever been to Ireland was when I had some Jameson some weeks ago. But Brigid's Missionary activity is still relevant to the Church today, because she taught us about how to spread the Gospel

message by using her creativity.

Because creativity is what the Church actually needs these days. I am so tired of coming to church-wide events only to hear the same stories about how we are closing churches, how we are living a paradigm shift, and how demographic trends are actually unfavorable to us.

It almost seems to me that the Church has arrived to a state of constant defeat, and that we are simply not able to do anything anymore. We would just have to wait for a long and predictable death, by merging congregations, selling our property and shrinking to become a kind of a social aid agency that, once in a while, does some liturgies in nice cathedrals.

But I refuse to believe that the Mission God entrusted to us is finished. And this is when we turn to the life of Brigid and to her creativity as an inspiration for our lives today.

Brigid learned how to spread the Christian message by using tools that were available to her at the time. Very often, she used cultural elements and adapted them for Christian worship.

Over the course of the weekend, we learned about being creative and rethinking how to use our worship spaces with plenty of symbols that relate to the Christian message, to our received Tradition and to local traditions of our community,

thus speaking the Gospel message anew in a context that, very often, is opposed to, or simply doesn't know, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But our sparkle of creativity cannot stop there. Think about the needs of your community, and about the struggles of the people who surround it. Brigid wasn't a mere nun. She was among the leaders of her nation. She spoke to chieftains, she participated in several Church councils. She was a very active, strong woman who made sure that the Church was represented in all spheres of her society.

Likewise, the Old Testament reading today tells us of another very strong woman: Deborah. She was a prophetess, and a judge. The Bible tells us that the Israelites came up to her for judgement. Deborah was a woman of faith. Her leadership style was based on the fact that she believed that God had called her to be the leader of her people.

How can we – the Church – be leaders in our society these days? How can your churches be a sparkle of light in the midst of neighborhoods, towns, communities... that seem to be more and more individualistic and hostile to any attempt of reconciliation and redemption.

We also live difficult financial times for the Church. We do not have the resources we used to have. We are slowly, and painfully, learning how to live with much less funds, if compared to 50 years ago. This is when Mission as a whole

needs to be creative.

But do not be afraid, because God is not calling only the ones who are wise, or powerful, or rich, or of noble birth. God chose what is low and despised and weak in the world. Basically, God is calling every one of us to be inspired with the Holy Spirit's creativity and go into the world to take Jesus' message of love and reconciliation.

The message that comes from Jesus today is a message of hope, not fear. Which is why we must be gathered here in this place made holy by the Sacrament and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to go ahead with God's mission – no matter what obstacles we have ahead.

Jesus' message is very clear. The kingdom of God and God's righteousness are the things we should be seeking. So, it is very clear we need to stop living in fear, thinking the Church is dying or that it has no hope. Christ is our hope.

The message St. Brigid prayerfully sends to us is that, if we are to pursue the Kingdom of God, then we must be creative. We must adapt. We must retell the truth of the Gospel according to every culture, every setting, every environment.

So when we leave this place, we should ask ourselves: what are we (as a church, and also as individual Christians) doing to spread the Gospel message among the people we are called to serve. It is always important to remind that a parish is a

geographical area. It has boundaries. It is a specific part of the world we are called to serve. Worship empowers us to fulfill the God's mission in the world, but Church doesn't end after Sunday coffee hour. Church must go on... Church must be open as a place of transformation. Church must be a beacon of hope in the midst of a fast paced society that isolates and alienates us.

But this will not happen if we don't stop lamenting our losses and act. This morning, we talked about community sacred art making. Now, I encourage you to think about community CHURCH making. What is it to be THE CHURCH among the people you are called to serve?