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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we celebrate our patronal feast, we remember the zeal with which Saint Patrick proclaimed the Catholic Faith to the people of Ireland. With selflessness, he returned to the people who had previously enslaved him in order to bring to them the saving message of Jesus. He did not see them as enemies, but as brothers and sisters in need of the greatest gift he could share. Such a gift could only be given in person, with his own voice and by entering into their lives.

When first I preached to you as the Bishop of Harrisburg, words of Pope Francis's 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* made me think of Patrick's mission. The Holy Father wrote these words: "It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. … Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all."

It was with this dream of the Holy Father in mind that I reflected on that brilliant stained-glass window in our Cathedral depicting Saint Patrick preaching and engaging the Druid Irish King and Queen prior to their conversion to Christianity. At great personal cost, with tremendous humility, and with an openness to forgive, Saint Patrick engaged those who not only disagreed with him, but who had persecuted him. This powerful scene provides an image for how we, the Catholics of the Church in Harrisburg, need to be looking *outwardly* to engage the world around us with a desire to encounter others, to listen, to discern and to act, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, bearing the joyful and redemptive message of the Gospel.

In our ever-increasingly fractured world, where wars disrupt human fraternity, partisan politics divide our nation, ideological entrenchment separates members of the Church, and many of our families suffer from divisions and pain, the example of our patron Patrick compels us to be instruments of communion and fraternity. As the Apostle of Ireland heard the voice of the Irish calling him to return to their shores with the Gospel, if we listen, we can hear the voice of humanity beckoning us to leave our homes and our places of comfort to bring the healing of Christ to those who need reconciliation and peace.

This is a challenge to each of us to live our faith more actively, without fear; to be Christians in whom Jesus is recognized, visible signs of His presence in our midst. Once again, I invite you to join me in the work of renewing and strengthening our faith; in opening our hearts anew to the power of the Holy Spirit who stirs into flame the gift of God that we have received; and to carry enthusiastically the unifying message of Christ to our world today.

Saint Patrick, pray for us!

+ Timothy C. Senior

Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior
Bishop of Harrisburg