



**Roman martyrology:** In Ireland, sisters and daughters of King Laoghaire, and among the first converts to Christianity made by Saint Patrick. They received the veil of religion from his hands, and the tradition is that in the act of receiving immediately afterwards Holy Communion from him, they gave up their innocent souls to God. (also known as Eithne and Fedelma)

**Etymology:** Fidelma: Meaning “beauty” or “constant.”

Eithne: Means “kernel of a nut or seed” but it may also be related to Aidan meaning “little fire.”

### **SHORT BIOGRAPHY**

The story is told that one summer day the little daughters of King Laoghaire of Connaught, Ethenea and Fidelmia, who were barely out of childhood and full of fun, went for their daily bath in a private place near the palace, a place to which no one ever came so early in the morning. But this special day they were surprised to hear voices and see tents encamped on the grassy slope near the pool.

There was a drone of a strange language and every now and again a sweet voice broke into song and mingled with that of the birds in the nearby woods and the murmuring of the river. Saint Patrick and his companions, who had arrived during the night with a message for the King of Connaught, were praying the Divine Office in Latin. Finally, each group spied the other.

The older princess asked, "Who are you, and where do you come from?"

Patrick hesitated, then said: "We have more important things to tell you than just our names and where we're from. We know who the one true God is whom you should adore..."

The girls were delighted, rather than annoyed. In a flash something seemed to light

up inside them, to make a blinding white blaze in their hearts and minds. They knew at once that this was real, real news and that it was true. It all happened instantaneously. Then they asked a whole torrent of questions:

"Who is God?" "Where does He live?" "Will He live forever?" and on and on as excited young people do.

Patrick answered each question quickly and simply. He, too, was delighted: the light that blazed up in the girls was in the man, too, and the three lights together made a tremendous glow. Everyone else stood listening raptly, feeling lucky to be witnesses to the saintly man and the sweet girls--and the Holy Spirit in their midst.

"Oh, tell us how to find the good God. Teach us more about the kind Jesus, who died upon the Cross. Tell us more, more, more," the princesses urged. But there was no need for more; the two had already received the gift of the Spirit of Truth.

Patrick led them to their bathing pool, where he baptized them. For a short time thereafter, Ethna and Fedelma were very quiet for they were in deep prayer. Meanwhile, Patrick prepared to say Mass. Then the princesses began again, "I want to see Jesus Christ now," said Ethna.

"And so do I," echoed Fedelma. "I want to be with Him in His home forever."

Patrick, moved by this loving longing, very gently explained that they would not be able to see God until after their death. They were still young, so it would be a long time before they could see Him as He is. If they lived good Christian lives, then they would be able to go to God for always and great joys would replace the present sorrows. The girls pondered this as Patrick began the Mass.

As Mass went on everyone was still, but the river and woods seemed to sing God's praises. Then the youngest man rang a little bell and all bowed their heads. Jesus Christ was with them in the grassy knoll in the king's park. Soon the bell rang again. Patrick beckoned the princesses forward and gave them Holy Communion.

For a little while the girls looked so happy and so beautiful that they were like angels. And then, we are told, they died on 433.. They longed so much to be with Jesus that they died of longing. Saint Patrick was exceedingly happy to have met such quick and whole- hearted belief.