

Matt Talbot

Venerable Matt Talbot, Patron Saint of Alcoholics

Born: 1856

Died: 1925

Declared Venerable:
1975

Commemorated 19 June



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**DERRY DIOCESAN
CATECHETICAL
CENTRE**

Matt Talbot was born in Dublin, Ireland, the second eldest of twelve children of Charles and Elizabeth Talbot, a poor family in the North Strand area.

His father and all but the oldest of his brothers were heavy drinkers. In 1868 Matt left school at the age of twelve and went to work in E & J Burke, a beer bottling firm.

He began drinking by taking the dregs from the bottom of bottles that had been returned. He very soon began "*sampling their wares*", and was considered a hopeless alcoholic by age sixteen.

He then went to the Port & Docks Board where he worked in the whiskey stores. He frequented pubs in the city with his brothers and friends, spending most or all of his wages and running up debts.

When his wages were spent, he borrowed and scrounged for money. He pawned his clothes and boots to get money for alcohol. On one occasion, he stole a fiddle from a street entertainer and sold it to buy drink.

One evening in 1884 28-year old Talbot, who was penniless and out of credit, waited outside a pub in the hope that somebody would invite him in for a drink. After several friends had passed him without offering to treat him, he went home in disgust and announced to his mother that he was going to "take the pledge" (renounce drink). He took the pledge for three months.

To find the strength to remain sober, Matt attended Mass every morning and received Holy Communion.

Having drunk excessively for 16 years, Matt maintained sobriety for the following forty years of his life. There is evidence that Matt's first seven years after taking the pledge were especially difficult.

He found strength in prayer, began to attend daily Mass, and read religious books and pamphlets. He repaid all his debts scrupulously. Having searched for the fiddler whose instrument he had stolen, and having failed to find him, he gave the money to the church to have Mass said for him.

From being an indifferent Catholic in his drinking days, Matt became increasingly devout. He lived a life of prayer, fasting, and service, trying to model himself on the sixth century Irish monks.

Even when his drinking was at its worst, Matt was a hard worker. When he joined Pembertons, the building contractors, as a hod-carrier, his work-rate was such that he was put first on the line of hodmen to set the pace. Later, in Martin's timber yard, he took on the meanest and hardest jobs. He was respectful to his bosses but not obsequious, and on occasion stood up for a fellow-worker.

On 22 September 1911 Talbot joined the builder's labourers branch of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. When the Dublin Lockout of 1913 led to sympathy strikes throughout the city, the men of Martin's, including Talbot, came out. At first Matt refused his strike pay, saying that he had not earned it. Later he accepted it but asked that it be shared out among the other strikers.

Though he has not yet been formally recognized as a saint, he has been declared Venerable and is considered a patron of those struggling with alcoholism and addiction.