

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

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By James Collins

My wife, my children, all my grandchildren and I were born in America. This is the single greatest physical blessing that we have received. Our family endured the brutal oppression of the British for 800 years. My folks lived through the IRA fight for freedom, a civil war, and arrived in America just in time for the depression. It has been a continuous struggle but we have prevailed because of the American way of life and the opportunities of education and work that is an American blessing.

When something is stolen from you, or you are deprived of an opportunity to exist you remember it forever. The English would not allow the Irish to be educated. They close down the schools and threatened teachers with jail or death. The Irish responded by creating hedge schools. These consisted of taking the small children out into the fields behind the hedges and using slates and chalk teaching them to read and write. If the English found a class, they hanged the teacher then and there. In America, we obtained free education and the chance for advanced university degrees. We do not forget. Everyone in our family pursued a college education. My wife, I, and all of our siblings have college degrees. Each of my children has multiple degrees and is very successful in American business and education. Three of my grandchildren have PhD's and two more are presently pursuing doctorates. These are the blessings of America.

Ireland was a land of plenty. The English came and confiscated the land forcing the Irish into the Rocky West Coast. Subsistence was primarily dependent on the potato. In 1845 when the famine hit, all the potato crops failed. The Irish encountered a dreadful famine. Plenty of food was available but the English collected it and sent it to England leaving the Irish to die. Over 1 million died in the fields and on the roads. To this day, you can see large famine graveyards. There are no markers. They died alone without families or kin and are unknown to this day. America is a land of plenty. Millions who came from areas of war and famine celebrate Thanksgiving, a unique American holiday. The vast amounts of cheap available food are another American blessing.

As immigrants to this great nation, we were despised. In 1845, we arrived in rags, wretched, ill with cholera and typhus so they dumped us on the shore to live or die on our own. We were living skeletons from the results of the famine. We had no education and limited talents except for the labor of our backs in the most dangerous jobs available. In the South, slaves had a value much higher than the Irish, so the Irish were used for the more dangerous jobs. A lot of us died or were maimed for life. In the north, it was not much better. Signs are on the windows of boarding houses and stores and said "no Irish, no dogs". The newspaper had ads for workers with the admonition "no Irish need apply". The women found it slightly easier to get jobs as menial help in the houses of the rich. Nevertheless, each day the men headed into dangerous jobs. To succeed we used our strengths – our numbers and our clan and tribal traditions. We helped each

other to find jobs. We formed unions and organized political operations that ended up ruling the slums of the big cities. We forced our way into the professions and worked our way to the top. The ability to do that is again another American blessing.

To celebrate all these blessings I have given certain admonitions to my children.

As you step out into life, you take your first steps away from the family

We your parents have gone this road before you. We leave you this legacy.

Many people your age step out into the world timid and cautious.

Remember who you are and where you come from.

Your roots are in Ireland, the isle of saints and scholars.

You are Gaels from the race of Celts.

At one time, your ancestors ruled the known world.

Your ancestors loved freedom more than life itself.

Several times, they were conquered yet threw off their chains.

Liberty tastes sweet. Slavery is bitter.

Feed the hungry. Your ancestors knew famine.

Give alms to the poor. Your ancestors were the poorest in Europe.

Assist the weak. Your ancestors suffered persecution.

Assist the immigrant. We were once them and we were despised.

Help the homeless. England dispossessed our ancestors.

America took us in. A debt we can never repay.

Its blessings have made us who we are today.

Do not fear death. We all must endure it until the Resurrection.

Trust in the Lord. Be fair, honest and just in all your dealings.

Hold fast to love, faith, hope and charity.

Step out with confidence and enthusiasm. It is a big world.

Do not act as if you are walking on eggshells.

Stomp around. Leave big footprints. Make a difference.

Let the world know the Irish passed by.

The world will be delighted to have known you.

THE END