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Blast From the Past: Immigrants

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Distinctly Catholic

I came across this account of an eighteenth century Irish émigré's voyage to the United States. It seems to me that people who endured such suffering then, as people who endure such suffering today, on account of their desire to come to America, have achieved the citizenship equivalent of what we Catholics call "baptism by desire." This account is found in Jay Dolan's *The Irish Americans*.

"One emigrant, whose voyage took nearly fifteen weeks under a ruthless captain, described some of the horrors of his journey in a letter to his father in Ireland: "Hunger and Thirst had now reduced our Crew to the last Extremity, nothing was now to be heard aboard our Ship but the Cries of distressed Children, and of their distressed Mothers, unable to relieve them. Our Ship now was truly a Spectacle of Horror! Never a Day passed without one or two of our Crew put over Board; many kill'd themselves by drinking Salt Water, and their own urine was a common Drink. Yet in the midst of all our Miseries, our Captain shewed not the least Remorse or Pity." When the ship finally reached the port of New Castle on the Delaware River, sixty-four of the emigrants and crew members had died."

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