

Daily Prayer

St Columba of Iona

Wednesday, June 9, 2021

We enter into a time of quiet. We offer to God our selves and in the silence know that God embraces us as God's very own. We offer our hopes and our concerns through our prayers and in the silence listen for God. Today we hold in our prayers the ordinary moments in life—the trials and the joys—and remember Columba, Abbot of Iona, Missionary, 597.

We begin by saying

Columba sailed away from Ireland to Britain, wishing to be a pilgrim for Christ.

Adomnan's Life of Columba

The First Reading

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written,

'He catches the wise in their craftiness',
and again,

'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise,
that they are futile.'

So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

1 Corinthians 3.11-23

The Psalm

I have found David my servant; *
with my holy oil have I anointed him.

My hand will hold him fast *
and my arm will make him strong.

No enemy shall deceive him, *
nor any wicked man bring him down.

I will crush his foes before him *
and strike down those who hate him.

My faithfulness and love shall be with him, *
and he shall be victorious through my name.

I shall make his dominion extend *
from the Great Sea to the River.

He will say to me, 'You are my Father, *
my God, and the rock of my salvation'

Psalm 89.20-26

The Gospel Reading

The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

Luke 10.17-20

We continue with the reflection that follows. In silence, we ask what the reading has to say to us today. Is there something in the reflection that draws us more deeply into the reading? What does God have to say to us? What do we have to ask God?

The Reflection

Susan Haig

Remembering St. Columba

His name means dove. He's remembered as the founding abbot of Iona, a beloved son of Ireland, the first apostle to Scotland, and a tireless, passionate scholar. A saint revered throughout the Christian world. But a careful reading of his life reveals an imperfect human being who, while seeking holiness of life, often struggled mightily along the way. Like so many others in the great company of saints, Columba often fell short in keeping the commandments to love God and neighbour. In truth, he was both dove and hawk. A peacemaker and a troublemaker. This is illustrated by the story of the genesis of his missionary zeal and departure for Scotland.

Columba – or Colm in Gaelic – was born on December 7, 521 in Gartan, County Donegal. His great-great grandfather on his father's side was Niall, an Irish High King of the 5th century. As a young man from privilege, he studied under both Saints Finnian of

Moville and Finnian of Clonard. It was at Clonard Abbey in 551 at the age of 30 that he was ordained a priest. When a prince cousin gave him some land, he started his own monastery, eventually founding 30 some monasteries over the next decade. He travelled a great deal throughout the country, preaching the Good News and inspiring the conversion of many with his personal holiness. Some of these included Druid leaders. He may have also inspired with his physical bearing, for according to one contemporary, he was “a striking figure of great stature and powerful build, with a loud melodious voice which could be heard from one hilltop to another.”

The infamous battle which led to Columba's exile to Scotland had its roots in St. Finnian of Clonard's return from Rome in 540. He came home with a copy of St. Jerome's Vulgate Bible in hand. This was the very first Vulgate to reach Irish shores, so a very big deal! Finnian planned to translate the Latin into Gaelic, but Columba had the same idea and managed to get hold of the book and secretly make his own copy. Whether it was for the purpose of evangelisation and sharing with others, or whether it was for the thrill of possessing such a treasure, we shall never know. Most likely it was a complex mixture of motives. In any event, when Finnian discovered the truth he was enraged and demanded that both the book and the copy be returned to him. Columba refused. And thus began the first recorded copyright battle.

Finnian took the matter to King Diarmait, the High King of Ireland, for arbitration. Believing he had done nothing wrong and that the King would take his side – since he was a relative – Columba agreed. Finnian argued that it was his book and so no one could copy it. And further, if it could be copied, it could be done so only with his permission and through certain agreed-to procedures. Columba responded that the book had not suffered by his copying, and that further “it is not right that the divine words

in that book should perish, or that I or any other should be hindered from writing them or reading them or spreading them among the tribes." In closing, he submitted that those who owned the knowledge through books were duty bound to spread the knowledge by copying and sharing them. Not to share knowledge was a far greater offense than to copy a book that lost nothing by being copied. In the end Diarmait ruled in Finnian's favour, famously saying, "To every cow belongs its calf; to every book its copy."

Tragically, at that point, legal dispute spiralled into bloody battle. A battle known as the Battle of the Book. Columba refused to accept the verdict and held onto his precious copy. He was already angry with King Diarmait, objecting to his use of a Druid advisor instead of a Christian, and outraged by the Diarmait's violation of sanctuary in the murder of one of Columba's own cousins, a man named Curnan. Curnan had been dragged by Diarmait's henchmen out of a church in which he had sought refuge and brutally hacked to death. In 561 Columba enlisted the help of his clan, the O'Neills, and prepared for battle at Cooldrevny, leading a force of 2,300 men. Columba and his clansmen triumphed. What he could not secure in law, he had secured by brute force. He kept his Bible. The price was 3,000 lives.

Appalled as are we by this violence, a synod of abbots and bishops convened and threatened to ex-communicate him. Instead, they settled on exile, stating that he should never "see Ireland again." At first Columba refused to accept their verdict and went off to consult with his confessor, Saint Molaise. This wise man affirmed the sentence, adding that Columba should atone by converting as many souls to Christianity as he had killed. Thus, the sinner set sail in a small boat with 12 companions, sorrowfully crossing the Irish Sea to Scotland. They landed first on the mainland of Kintyre, but since they could still see Ireland, they set sail again.

On May 12, 563, they landed on the bleak, windswept island of Iona and settled, as it was the first place they had found from which Ireland was not visible. (One of the curious topographical features of Iona is a hill known as "The Hill with its back to Ireland.")

Columba and his friends set about building the monastery of Iona. Once settled they began their missionary efforts on the mainland of Scotland and northern England, converting the Scots of Dalriada and then the Picts of Caledonia. So powerful and magnetic was Columba as a preacher and teacher, that stories were told of his prowess that seem mythical or superstitious to us today. It was said that when he was at the closed gates of the fortress of King Brude of Inverness on a missionary journey, they simply opened before them when he made the sign of the cross. The king was so overawed by the miracle that he and all his household converted on the spot. Similarly, a story has come down to us that on one occasion he saved a man from the clutches of the Loch Ness monster by simply ordering it to retreat. It was as if Columba were one of the 70 sent out by Jesus, who then returned with reports that in His name even the demons would submit and obey. Such was the power given to him by Our Lord that he was able to walk amongst snakes and scorpions and crush them, suffering no harm or hurt himself. (Lk 10:19).

The troublesome priest, both hawk and dove, grew through his suffering and penitence to become an authority sought out for his wisdom and holiness. In 575 he was entreated to go back to Ireland to mediate a dispute that had arisen between the High King and a league of poets. Desiring to remain faithful to the terms of his exile, he travelled home blindfolded. Although his sympathies were with the poets, his reputation as a sage and fair peacemaker was respected by all. He spoke to the assembled nobles and clergy with such authority that the King was persuaded to reverse his original

decree and the hostilities between the parties calmed.

Columba returned to Iona and spent his remaining years there, praying, fasting, and teaching his monks to read and copy the Scriptures. The community prospered and eventually they would number approximately 150. It became one of the leading intellectual and artistic centres of northern Europe, exerting an influence out of all proportion to its size and location. Columba himself was a man of letters, writing several hymns and transcribing some 300 books. He lived to the august old age of 75, dying on June 9, 597.

Today we pause to remember him. To be inspired by him. And although there could be so many tributes paid to honour his glorious memory, the words of his biographer Adomnan provide a fitting summation of his life's work and the highest praise: he had been "a pilgrim for Christ."

When the time is right, we conclude our time of silence with the canticle

The Canticle ~ A Song of Pilgrimage

While I was still young, ♦

I sought Wisdom openly in my prayer.

Before the temple I asked for her, ♦

and I will search for her until the end.

From the first blossom to the ripening grape, ♦

my heart delighted in her.

My foot walked on the straight path, ♦

from my youth I followed her steps.

I inclined my ear a little and received her, ♦

I found for myself much instruction.

I made progress in Wisdom; ♦
to the One who sent her, I will give glory.
I directed my soul to Wisdom, ♦
and in purity have I found her.
With her, I gained understanding from the first, ♦
therefore will I never be forsaken.
My heart was stirred to seek her, ♦
with my tongue will I sing God's praise.

Ecclesiasticus 51.13a,13c-17,20,21a,22b

*We continue in prayer for those people and situations that we hold up before God (The Intercessions)
and continue with the concluding collect, the Lord's prayer and the closing sentences.*

The Intercessions

Let us give thanks to God,
the God of all peoples of the earth.
For the colour and forms of your creation
and our place within it,
we bring our thanks, good Lord:
your mercy endures for ever.

For our daily food,
and for those whose work and skill
bring your good gifts to us,
we bring our thanks, good Lord:
your mercy endures for ever.

For the gifts and graces inspired in human minds and hearts;
for insight and imagination,
for the skills of research
which bring healing and fulfilment to the lives of many;
we bring our thanks, good Lord:
your mercy endures for ever.

For the light and shades of the changing seasons,
and their variety and dependability;
for new life and growth out of barrenness and decay;
we bring our thanks, good Lord:

your mercy endures for ever.

For new hope and strength in our communities,
especially in your Church and among all you call to serve you,
we bring our thanks, good Lord;

your mercy endures for ever.

For all in whose lives we see
goodness, kindness, gentleness, patience and humility,
and all the fruit of the Spirit,
we bring our thanks, good Lord:

your mercy endures for ever.

For the life we have been given,
and for all those whom you have given us to share it,
we bring our thanks, good Lord:

your mercy endures for ever.

Our prayers conclude

O God,
you girded your servant Columba
with the cincture of holiness
and made him a pilgrim for Christ
in the midst of the Irish and Scottish peoples.
Grant that, having his life and labours in remembrance,
we may rest upon your love and be cheerful in all adversities,
as we await the redemption of all things
in your well-beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ;
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

[let us pray as our Saviour taught us,]

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

We conclude

May God grant to the world justice, truth and peace.
Amen.

Credits:

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