

The Lord will find you.

Jer 29:1-14 Introducing Celtic Spirituality- World Day of Prayer March 22 St Clements Anglican Church, Merimbula

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Jeremiah's letter must have been a great shock to many. The trauma of exile was in leaving God behind. Religiously, the people had carried the ark through the desert to the Holy Land. Loyally, they had paid tribute to the priests as intermediaries and reverently built a Temple to house the Lord. Now Jeremiah was telling them, 'Go! God goes with you'. Live your lives in another place, plant, grow, eat the food and marry the locals, prosper! – God will find you. "...You will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with your heart. I will be found by you."¹

Jeremiah announced God was out of the box and the gatekeepers were no longer necessary. Humankind, God's creations, were offered a direct line. All they had to do was call.

Around about thousand or so years later (3-4th Century) Christianity spread through the Celtic peoples of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Britany and Isle of Mann. A people who already understood the Spirit that dwelled in the land.

Old, very old, even older than Christianity, the Celts incorporated the Good News into an ancient spirituality that recognised that God was everywhere and in everything. Their older way of prayer is entirely different from the narrower, petitionary prayer many of us know. It is closely related to the Hebrew tradition of blessing God for the blessings God bestows on us. When we do this, we acknowledge that God is the source of life and the origin of all goodness and gifts. To bless is then an act of praise and gratitude. Celtic prayer is so much more than asking for something.

It means that there is a Celtic way of seeing things: Landscapes, weather, seasons and objects take on a different hue.

In many ways, Celtic spirituality is a continuous conversation with the Divine. Prayer that is as natural as breathing, unselfconscious and part of daily living.

In monastic tradition, all the functions of the monastery are an offering to God. That is, work **IS** prayer. Sacrifice is prayer. In contrast, Celtic spirituality is that everything is a gift from God: not just the water being drawn from the well but

¹ Jeremiah 24:12-14

the jug and the ability to draw it; the field to drink it and the crop that grows. It is the complete opposite of sacrifice.

Celtic spirituality differs in that it sees the Triune God reflected in *all* things and all places. God does not sit in a temple or a church. Jesus is not on a throne in the heavens, the spirit is not limited to angels and visitations. God flows through and in everything at all times. He/she is in the mist that shrouds the home, in forests and creatures. The space between the Divine and us is thin and some times and some places, thinner. God is with us, ever present watching.

There is an integration that has not always been available to those raised elsewhere. The prayers New Hebrides fishermen say softly as they leave their homes for work – sounds like the murmuring of the sea. The rhythms, songs and poetry reflect and mix with the sounds around them.

Celtic spirituality sat silently along side both Protestant and Catholic churches. It was kept close to the hearts of the settled people and marked everything from dawn to dusk; the turning of the seasons and crops; birth and death as well as daily chores. The prayers which were hymns and poetry, said and sung, grew out of their sense of the presence of God as the most immediate reality of their lives. Religion permeated everything and they did not distinguish between secular and sacred. There was no such thing.

All of creation was home. They sang songs to celebrate the waking of the larks; the rising of the sun; their rest and their rising. They believed that every creature on earth, above or in the sea was giving glory to God. Imagine a world that sings praises!

Esther De Wald says, here are a people who move easily between worlds, the seen and the unseen, the Christian and the pre-Christian. They encounter fairies and talk to them – as they too are the spirit of the land just as they are at ease with the Trinity. I recognise similar characteristics in Aboriginal spirituality.

Mary Macrae was a dairy woman. At 99 she walked to church each Sunday in Harris. One stormy Sunday when the Minister expected no-one, he found Mary in the church. Mary, Mary, he said, what has brought you out on such a day and all alone. She said, I am not alone at all, far from it. There were three dear friends with me every step of the road coming. Three friends, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit with me every step of the way.

The nearness of God to his creation brought a strong sense that the heavenly powers were not far away but surrounded all men and women, day and night.² It seemed natural to turn to the Trinity and to Mary and the Saints for support and practical aid in everything that happened and everything they did in their lives. From lighting a fire or candle, milking the cows, making butter, weaving, driving the flocks and herds, sowing – everything was a cause for prayer.

Come Mary, and milk my cow
Come Bride and encompass her,
Come Columba the benign, and twine thy arms around my cow....

And invocations for protection showed the Triune was never far away. A walking prayer...

The 3 who are over me,
The 3 who are below me,
The 3 who are above me here;
The 3 who are above me yonder;
The 3 who are in the earth,
The 3 who are in the air,
The 3 who are in the heaven
The 3 who are in the great pouring sea.

As repeated, you could walk for miles.

Oh! what a wonderful thought. To live in a world of prayer, where God is near, where the mist is a sacred blanket and the snow a kiss from the heavens. What a challenge to go about our daily lives in continuous gratefulness and praise. The care that they bestowed on others is also available to us....especially those of us with aging bodies.

Be thou, O Christ, gentle son Mary,
Thou being who putteth sap in wood,
Pour thy grace into the bones unfruitful,
Pour thy light into the eyes of the blind.

Pour thy dew into the joints unpliant,
Pour thy salve into the eye without light,

² The Celtic Vision edited by Esther de Waal p. xxv

Lead now my soul to the dwelling of the martyrs,
Sustain my feel to the home of the saints.

I pray that I can become aware of every gentle step I take upon this sacred ground. But, to be honest, I cannot imagine how a people can maintain that linked relationship between God and earth when the earth is violated with bombs and tanks.

Let us send our prayers to heal this broken world. It is up to us to maintain the prayerful murmur that reflects the presence of God in all things.

The compassing God be on thee
The compassing God of life.
The compassing of Christ be on thee
The compassing of the Christ of love.
The compassing of Spirit be on thee
The compassing of the Spirit of Grace.
The compassing of the Three be on thee,
The compassing of the Three preserve thee.
The compassing of the Three preserve thee.
May the compassing of the Three shield you this day.
May the compassing of the Three shield you this night
From hate, from harm, from act, from ill.

Amen.

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