

Pilgrimage through Lent

This Lent, in the “Year for Priest” we will look to the example of a well-known and beloved priest, Saint Patrick. Patrick offers us a powerful example of someone who accepted the challenge that Lent poses us: to stretch beyond the familiar borders of the world we know, and to meet God there. The boy who would become a saint was born in Britain at the end of the fourth century. As a youth he was kidnapped and taken to Ireland as a slave, where he tended flocks and began to spend his time in prayer. In his work titled the “Confessio”, Patrick writes that as he prayed among the flocks, *“more and more, the love of God and the fear of him grew [in me], and [my] faith was increased and [my] spirit was quickened....”* After six years, Patrick escaped from captivity and returned to Britain to the safety of his parents and home. There in a dream he heard *“The voice of the Irish as if they were shouting with one voice’: ‘O holy boy, we beg you to come again and walk among us.”*



(Illustration by Mary Kurnick

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Eventually, Patrick returned to Ireland, as a Bishop. He converted the Celtic peoples of Ireland to Christianity by highlighting the many similarities between their beliefs and those of the Christian Faith. Their conversion brought to Christianity a unique perspective, *Celtic Spirituality*, which still finds an appeal to this day. With that in mind, we offer two aspects of Celtic Spirituality for your consideration during this Lenten Season.

PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage was a very important aspect of Celtic Spirituality.

Pilgrimage is always a search for God and God’s goodness. True pilgrimage has to do with a change of heart. The outward journey serves to frame an inner journey: a journey of repentance and rebirth; a journey which seeks a deeper faith, greater holiness; a journey in search of God.

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For the early Christian monks, the concept of pilgrimage was closely tied with the Christian notion of penance. Monks would often embark on pilgrimages as a way of seeking out a place which would reveal God to them.

Celtic men and women soon took up the practice of pilgrimage as a means of discovering their own path to God. As they began their pilgrimage, pilgrims would have distinctive dress, markings, or symbols which identified them as pilgrims. Along their way pilgrims would carry and leave behind tangible signs of their journey such as pilgrim's stones called, "cairns". Pilgrimages had a specific holy place as the final destination, such as the Holy Land, but also specific stops, other holy places, at along the way.

FINDING GOD IN THE 'THIN PLACE'

For Celtic Christians, God was found and experienced in what they referred to as the "thin places." It is in these places where the seen and unseen worlds are most closely connected and inhabitants of both worlds can momentarily touch the other. For us, then, it is a place where it is possible to touch and be touched by God, as well as the angels, saints and those who have died. Some have called this "thin place" the veil between this world and the next that is paper thin. In our lives that veil or "thin place" is thickened by sinful behavior or worry, anxieties, fears and stress. The Lenten disciplines of Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving are a means of reducing this thickening and of restoring our "thin places" where we touch and are touched by God.

This Lent we invite you as individuals and as members of our parish community on a Lenten Pilgrimage. As pilgrims marked with ashes we begin our pilgrimage on Ash Wednesday. After the services on Ash Wednesday, we will pick up our "pilgrim stone" and "pilgrimage guide" in the Gathering Space of the Church. Our pilgrimage will take us to the holy places mentioned in the Gospels of the six Sundays in Lent. Our pilgrimage destination will be Holy Week and Easter.

The objective or purpose of our Lenten Pilgrimage will be to find our "thin places" and to reduce any thickening that has occurred over times so as to touch and be touched by God.

