

Praying with the Celts

Recently we began to rewrite our prayers, especially our daily Evening Prayer and our Morning Prayers on Sunday. We are very blessed, in that most of our visitors join us for our times of prayer in the chapel. While searching for prayers we came across some old Celtic prayers that resonated with us. They have a simple rhythm that makes them easy to remember. Many of these were gathered together into the *Carmina Gadelica*, the most complete anthology of Celtic oral tradition ever assembled. This was the work of Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912) who spent hours with crofters, in their homes in front of peat fires, listening as they, "intoned in a low, recitative manner" these poems and prayers. The ancient Celts both loved and feared God.



God is in all of life from rising to sleep at night. We have incorporated this Morning Prayer into our Sunday mornings. We often see the mist scattering over the estuary and the Welsh Hills so the last lines appealed to us. In the same way may sin scatter from our lives at the beginning of the day.

Thanks to thee, O God, that I have risen today
To the rising of this life itself;
May it be to Thine own glory, O God of every gift,
And to the glory of my soul likewise.

O great God, aid Thou my soul
With the aiding of Thine own mercy;
Even as I clothe my body with wool,
Cover Thou my soul with the shadow of Thy wing.

Help me to avoid every sin
And the source of every sin to forsake;
And as the mist scatters on the crest of the hills,
May each ill haze clear from my soul, O God.

There are other morning prayers which we will use. The last three lines of one of them speaks of the Three, the Trinity. The all-embracing Three is a theme that occurs again and again amongst the Celts.

The Three that seek my heart,
The zeal that seeks my living soul,
The Three that seek my heart.

They consciously place their thoughts on God as the sun rises and there they remain throughout the day. Making oneself clean on that special day, the Lord's Day, had a prayer of its own. It is a good prayer every day – perhaps pinned up in the bathroom?

I am bathing my face
In the mild rays of the sun,
As Mary bathed Christ
In the rich milk of Egypt.

Sweetness be in my mouth,
Wisdom be in my speech,
The love the fair Mary gave her Son
Be in the heart of all flesh for me.

The love of Christ in my breast,
The form of Christ protecting me,
There is not in sea nor on land
That can overcome the King of the Lord's Day.

(From Catherine Maclean, crofter, Naast, Gairloch)

The page is filling too quickly and we will have to return to it another month, as there is not space to share the prayers the Celtic Christians chanted or sang over their work or as they lay down to sleep. Some of the latter we have incorporated into our evening prayer. To close, here is a prayer from St. Columba for journeys. That may mean, for us, a long trip from an airport but it can also be a visit to the shops, the journey to work by car, bus or train, even a walk with the dog.

Alone with thee, my God,
I journey on my way.
What need I fear, when thou art near, O king of night and day?
More safe am I within thy hand
Than if a host did round me stand.

(Columba, c.521 - 97)