

Life of St. Brigid



Like many others of our early saints, Brigid came of a noble family. Her father Dubthach [Duffa] was a distinguished Leinster chief descended from the kings of Ireland. For some reason which we do not know he and his wife lived for a time at Faughart near Dundalk, which was then a part of Ulster: and at Faughart Brigid was born about the year 455. The family must have soon returned however to their own district, for we know that Brigid passed her childhood with her parents in the neighbourhood of Kildare. She was baptised and carefully instructed and trained both in general education and in religion: for her father and mother were Christians. As she grew up, her quiet gentle modest ways pleased all that knew her. At the time of her birth, St. Patrick was in the midst of his glorious career; and some say that while she was still a child she met him, and that when he died she made with her own hands a winding sheet in which his body was laid in the grave; which may have happened, as she was ten or twelve years of age at the time of his death.

When Brigid came of an age to choose her way of life, she resolved to be a nun, to which her parents made no objection. After due preparation she went to a holy bishop of the neighbourhood, who at her request received her and placed a white robe on her shoulders and a white veil over her head. Here she remained for some time in companionship with eight other maidens who had been received with her, and who placed themselves under her guidance. As time went on she became so beloved for her piety and sweetness of disposition that many young women asked to be admitted; so that though she by no means desired that people should be speaking in her praise, the fame of her community began to spread through the country.

This first establishment was conducted strictly under a set of Rules drawn up by Brigid herself: and now, bishops in various parts of Ireland began to apply to her to establish convents in their several districts under the same rules. She was glad of this, and she did what she could to meet their wishes. She visited Longford, Tipperary, Limerick, South Leinster, and Roscommon, one after another; and in all these places she founded convents.

At last the people of her own province of Leinster, considering that they had the best right to her services, sent a number of leading persons to request that she would fix her permanent residence among them. She was probably pleased to go back to live in the place where she had spent her childhood; and she returned to Leinster where she was welcomed with great joy. The Leinster people gave her a piece of land chosen by herself on the edge of a beautiful level grassy plain well known as the Curragh of Kildare. Here, on a low ridge overlooking the plain, she built a little church under the shade of a wide-spreading oak tree, whence it got the name of Kill-dara, the Church of the Oak, or as we now call it, Kildare. This tree continued to flourish long after Brigid's death, and it was regarded with great veneration by the people of the place. A writer of the tenth century—four hundred years after the foundation of the church—tells us that in his time it was a mere branchless withered trunk; but the people had such reverence for it that no one dared to cut or chip it.

We are not quite sure of the exact year of Brigid's settlement here; but it probably occurred about 485, when she was thirty years of age. Hard by the church she also built a dwelling for herself and her community. We are told in the Irish Life of St. Brigid that this first house was built of wood like the houses of the people in general; and the little church under the oak was probably of wood also, like most churches of the time. As the number of applicants for admission continued to increase, both church and dwelling had to be enlarged from time to time; and the wood was replaced by stone and mortar. Such was the respect in which the good abbess was held, that visitors came from all parts of the country to see her and ask her advice and blessing: and many of them settled down in the place, so that a town gradually grew up near the convent, which was the beginning of the town of Kildare.

St Brigid's Cross

The story is told that, Brigid went to sit with a dying man. He was a chieftain, and members of his household hoped Brigid would speak to him of Christ, and perhaps convert him before he died. However the man was very ill and couldn't listen to such talk. So Brigid prayed for him instead. As she sat by his bedside, she picked up some of the rushes scattered on the floor. (This was typical of the time, rushes were warm and kept the floor clean). She began to weave rushes into a Cross, and as she did the Chieftain asked her about it. She wove and spoke of Jesus and prayed for the Chieftain. He came to know Christ that night, was baptised and died in peace. St Brigid's Crosses are traditionally made by Irish people around her feast day. Many homes place them over a door lintel or in the thatch of a house.



The cross became a symbol of peace and protection, protection of animals and protection from fire and disease and a blessing for home and hearth. Crosses were exchanged too in

times of clan feuds as a sign of reconciliation. From that time Irish people have never ceased to weave St. Brigid's crosses. The rushes represent our hopes, our dreams, our gifts and our efforts in working towards a more caring society.

St. Brigid gathers our dreams to weave something new. She gathers our rushes of sorrow and gladness, of happiness and pain, tears and laughter, kindness and caring, of voluntary groups and organisations, of families, relations and friends, of schools and hospitals, of work and sport and recreation, and all the little words and deeds offered in hope, in faith and in love. She is weaving them all with loving hands into a new form, a richer and more beautiful creation.

God, too weaves patiently and persistently with the rushes of our lives. He invites us to keep offering him the shreds of our suffering and the stuff of our dreams and to take our place beside him to weave the shape of new creation.

To welcome the new with faith and courage.

To cherish all that has gone before,

To become an example of justice and peace.

St Brigid's Cloak

St Brigid was a leader. Many women had gathered with her to learn, to pray and to serve the poor and sick. So she needed a place to live. Brigid went to the local king and asked for land for a convent (an Abbey). They went outside and stood on a high point looking across his many fields. The King asked her how much land she required, and she replied 'Just the land my cloak will cover'. He smiled and swiftly agreed to this, thinking it was an easy bargain. However, he soon stopped smiling when Brigid handed her cloak to four of her sisters. To his amazement, the ladies began to run and run, and the cloak stretched and stretched and grew, so that it covered a huge area. When a large plot of land was covered, the sisters stopped. In wonder and awe the King agreed to give Brigid the land covered by her cloak, and so the community now had a place to live and grow. What can we learn from this story? What is God teaching us through Brigid's life? - To dream big dreams with God and to risk being stretched even further than seems possible? - To create space for Gods work, even where it seems like no time or space is available? - To enjoy Gods sense of humour and generous love day by day!

St. Brigid's Blessing

1.

May Brigid bless the house wherein you dwell
Bless every fireside every wall and door

Bless every heart that beats beneath its roof
Bless every hand that toils to bring it joy
Bless every foot that walks its portals through
May Brigid bless the house that shelters you.

Prayer

St. Brigid Mary of Ireland ask for us all today,
the courage to do God's bidding
whatever the world may say.
The grace to be strong and valiant,
the grace to be firm and true
the grace to be faithful always
to God, God's Mother and you.