



Brigid of Kildare

From the little known of the historical St Brigid of Kildare, stories abound of her concern for the poor and oppressed, and the welcome offered to friends and strangers alike.



St Brigid and the Apples

One day when Brigid was on a long journey she stopped to rest by the wayside. A rich woman heard about this and brought her a beautiful basket of choice apples. No sooner had she received them than a group of very poor people came by and begged her for food. Without a moment's hesitation, Brigid gave them the choice apples. The rich woman complained to Brigid, 'I brought those apples for you, not for them.' Brigid's reply was: 'What is mine is theirs.'

This Brigid legend poses a challenge to us to work for a more equitable distribution of the world's resources, a challenge to a world where thousands die daily from hunger or hunger-related diseases or lack of clean water.

(<http://brigidine.org.au/about-us/our-patroness/>)

A reflection on Celtic Hospitality

(adapted from Margaret Silf, *Sacred Spaces*)

Sheltering groves are sacred spaces in the Celtic world, drawing us into their restfulness and refreshment. The 'trees' in our inner sacred groves are the people around us. Most of us have an inner circle of people who are deeply trusted and loved, and beyond that there will be outer circles of people with whom we are thrown together by circumstance. For the Celts the circle would have been wider still, including wisdom figures who have gone before us.

Whoever they are, all the people in our grove have roots and branches, like the woodland trees, and each of them has a personal identity. For the most part, at least in the

early stages of any relationship, we tend to meet each other in the more external aspects, or 'branches' of our experience; that is, in the outward and visible things that we share. The Celts, however, would have been quick to recall that in all things there is an invisible as well as a visible dimension, and the space where the invisible becomes manifest in the visible is sacred. If we look below the surface of our human circles, we become aware that what we experience in our relationships with our companions is profoundly shaped by a vast invisible network of roots that we cannot see. As friendship deepens into genuine intimacy, we begin to understand a little of the nature of the other person's roots, or the deeper, concealed aspects of who they are. The more we know of this invisible reality of each other, the more we understand, and the more we understand, the more readily we can forgive whatever needs to be forgiven.

Every individual in our personal sacred grove – and indeed in all of creation – is a sacred space, where the invisible depth of all that makes them who they are is expressed in the visible person we encounter. How might we revere the sacredness of each other? The hospitality of the sacred grove asks us to enter each other's space respectfully, gently and lovingly. Without this reverence there can be no communion. When we recognise the importance of our own invisible roots, and respect others' roots, we are moving into common ground, where real communion of heart and mind might become a possibility.

*Brigid, you were a woman of peace,
You brought harmony where there was conflict.
You brought light to the darkness.
You brought hope to the downcast.
May the mantle of your peace cover those who are
troubled and anxious,
And may peace be firmly rooted in our hearts
and in our world.*





Nano Nagle

Sent... to the Poor

(excerpts from Raphael Consedine pbvm, Fire on the Earth)

“Reflection on Nano’s life impels us to acknowledge that her conversion, vocation and spirituality were centred in the poor – the needs of the poor and the mystery of the poor. Throughout her life the poor are both the instruments of the divine purpose in her regard and those for whose sake she uses all her influence, energies and giftedness.

All of this activity on Nano’s part shows her practical awareness of varying levels of response to the cry of the poor. In visiting them and relieving their wants she gives presence and service in their daily necessities; in offering them education she empowers them to help themselves and one another; in setting up a network of schools she challenges the unjust laws which oppress all Catholics but weigh most heavily on the poorest and most helpless.

Who were the poor through whom the on-going call to conversion sounded in Nano’s heart and to whose service and evangelisation she gave herself with so much insight, energy and practicality? There were, of course, the children of Cork’s poorest districts, but they were also the sick, lonely and aged whom she visited and tended in the public infirmaries and in their garrets, the prostitutes whom she was slandered for knowing and for whom she longed to build a refuge, the elderly women for whom she did build a home, the Irish exiles in the West Indies for whom she trained catechists, the adults to whom she gave religious instruction.

Nano’s service of the poor was not a ‘one-way traffic’ – she received from them, learned from them. As they drew her into more complete self-giving, she experienced the joy of that giving and recognised that joy as divine gift. So it was that the outward stages of Nano’s involvement with the poor were paralleled by an inner transformation of her heart and mind as she grew in understanding of

the mystery of Christ’s complete self-giving and of his identification of himself with the person in need. It was in and through her life-long response to the needs of the poor and the mystery of the poor that Nano the socialite became Nano the completely dedicated woman who in her last moments was able to sum up her life’s message as Jesus did: Love.”

Woman of Welcoming Heart

*They know her in the crowded lonely ways
woman of welcoming heart, whose lantern sheds
kind beams for eyes waste-misted by the weary miles,
for them her hands are open, for her their doors.
Room is made by dim and smoking fire, some small crust
shared,
and she, receiving, knows still more to give,
and, welcomed, grows in art of welcoming.*

*Apart, in shadowed hours of night and dawn,
leaning heart to heart on the One who pulses life
into the lowliest and least of all that lives,
she learns to unclasp the last-kept store
and lay it down in welcome: ‘Take and share.’*

*Until, the last loaf broke, the last wine poured,
she can dare the outer darkness, the fine-piercing sword,
and bear to be bereft...
heart-certain that beyond this last black mile
light streams from beckoning windows and from wide-
flung door,
where she will hear the voice grown dear in silent
listening years:*

‘Woman of welcoming heart, here is your home.’

Raphael Consedine pbvm, Songs of the Journey





Daniel Delany

An Education for All

Born in rural Ireland in the mid-18th century, young Daniel Delany experienced the warmth of hospitality from a very early age. Welcomed into the home of his aunts in the face of family adversity, he was nurtured in the underground Catholic faith by the local pastor, who himself resided in a mud hut. Having discerned a vocation to the priesthood he was smuggled to France with the financial support of family and friends. Daniel knew what it was to be cared for, even by those with limited resources themselves.

France of the 18th century was a place of great privilege for priests and the Church. As a student and newly ordained priest Daniel was blessed with academic brilliance and a wide social circle. Life in France had much to offer the young Fr Delany. Nonetheless Daniel returned to his native home and his mother but was horrified by the social and political situation which confronted him: a Catholic Church fighting for freedom from Protestant rule, an Irish Government fighting for Independence from the British, and Irish peasantry doing anything they could to survive. His people were uneducated, poor and desperate.

Shocked and distinctly uncomfortable with all that he encountered in his home, Daniel resolved to leave behind the hedge schools and bog churches and return to the universities and cathedrals of France. Many opportunities for a successful and fulfilling career and comfortable lifestyle awaited him... and yet, he stayed, immersing himself in the lives of the poor – his people, in his home.

Daniel Delany's life became dedicated to offering an education that welcomed all – all ages, from all spheres of society. We can only imagine his willingness to enter the lives of the poor was born of his deep faith and his own experiences of receiving hospitality.

The Acorn and the Oak

*In hearts we wonder where love is found.
We keep on searching, our quest abounds.
From darkest valleys to brightest skies, through all of
creation we are inspired.
For God is near us, and never far, God's place of resting
is every heart.*

*So let us journey to the end, with hands now open to foe
and friend.*

*To light the darkness and seek for hope, to fight for
justice as prophets spoke,
And in creation your wisdom know, your sign and
symbol, the acorn and the oak.*

*In places darkened by fear and war.
We speak forgiveness to every heart.
The poor, the lonely, the ones who mourn, will find us
waiting with open doors,
For God is near us and all who weep, Our Lord and
Shepherd who never sleeps.*

*There is no future that we can build, without love's
presence and be fulfilled
To build a new world where hope is born, where lives
once broken will watch the dawn,
For God is with us to hold and heal, no longer strangers,
our God is near.*

*The God of history calls us to be the voice of freedom so
all can see
The flame of Brigid to light the way, the words of Daniel
echo in prayer,
So may they guide us as Saint and Friend, our own
companions till journey's end.*

