

Each Day & Each Night

Celtic prayers from Iona

Some sample pages

J. Philip Newell



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PREFACE



This collection of morning and evening prayers (originally published in 1994) grew initially out of my desire for a discipline and shape in daily personal prayer. During my time as Warden of Iona Abbey, members and associates of the Iona Community, whose first rule is to pray and study the scriptures daily, expressed the need for a prayer book for individual use. I hope these prayers will continue to be helpful to them and to the many others who have made use of this resource well beyond the bounds of the Iona Community.

On Iona people often indicated to me that they would like their prayers at home to be based on the major themes of daily prayer at the Abbey, and so I wove the weekly pattern of themes from Iona into this six-day cycle of prayer. On Mondays the emphasis is on justice and peace; on Tuesdays there is a concentration on prayer for healing; on Wednesdays the focus is on the goodness of creation and care for the earth; on Thursdays the theme is commitment to Christ; on Fridays there is a celebration of the communion of heaven and earth; and on Saturdays the emphasis is on welcome and hospitality. Originally I assumed that on Sundays the norm was to join others for prayer rather than being on one's own. I continue to hope that this can be the pattern for our lives.

Included in the appendix is a lectionary of psalms and gospel readings used in the Abbey. This is based upon 'The Revised Common Lectionary' prepared by the Consultation on Common Texts (1978) in which many churches participated, including the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist.

The little island of Iona in the Western Isles of Scotland is known as one of Britain's most historic holy places. It was there in the 6th century that St Columba established his mission from Ireland. Iona is remembered as the cradle of Christianity for much of Scotland and northern England. It is a beautiful Hebridean island, described by George MacLeod – the founder of the modern-day Iona Community – as 'a thin place' in which matter is only thinly separated from spirit. This great Celtic mystic of the 20th century, Lord MacLeod of Fuinary, who was also a Church of Scotland minister, saw that the eternal is 'seeping' through the physical. He was not, of course, speaking only of Iona, but of Iona as a sign or sacrament of what is most deeply true of every place and every time. As the overlapping strands in Celtic artwork suggest, the life of heaven is inseparably woven into the life of earth. God is the Life within all life, the Light behind all light. 'Shafts of that divine light,' said the 4th-century Celtic teacher Pelagius, 'penetrate the thin veil that divides heaven from earth.'

The 1400th anniversary of Columba's death in 1997 further developed an awareness in Britain of Iona as one of the greatest centres of the ancient Celtic mission. Ironically 597 was also when Augustine of Canterbury began his mission from Rome, in exactly the same year as Columba's death. The Iona mission and the mission from Rome represented radically different ways of seeing. Two major features of the Celtic tradition distinguish it from what in contrast can be called the 'Mediterranean' tradition. Celtic spirituality is marked by the belief that

what is deepest in us is the image of God. Sin has distorted and obscured that image but not erased it. The Mediterranean tradition, on the other hand, in its doctrine of original sin has taught that what is deepest in us is our sinfulness. This has given rise to a tendency to define ourselves in terms of the ugliness of our sin instead of the beauty of our origins. The second major characteristic of the Celtic tradition is a belief in the essential goodness of creation. Not only is creation viewed as a blessing, it is regarded as a theophany or a showing of God. Thus the great Celtic teachers refer to it as 'the book of creation' in which we may read the mystery of God. The Mediterranean tradition, on the other hand, has tended towards a separation of spirit and matter, and thus has distanced the mystery of God from the matter of creation.

The clash of these two traditions in Britain late in the 6th century led eventually to the Synod of Whitby in 664 and the tragic displacement of the Celtic mission. Banished to the edges of British Christianity the Celtic way of seeing was marginalised. Its spirituality was now to live on not within the four walls of organised religion but outwith the formal teachings and practices of the church, primarily on the Celtic fringes of Britain.

(Preface continues ...)



TUESDAY

Prayers for Healing



If I ascend to heaven
you are there, O God.
And if I make my bed in hell,
still you are with me.

(Ps 139:8)

Silence

*Be still
and aware of God's presence
within and all around.*



Opening prayer and thanksgiving

In the beginning, O God,
you shaped my soul and set its weave.
You formed my body
and gave it breath.
Renew me this day
in the image of your love.
O great God, grant me your light.
O great God, grant me your grace.
O great God, grant me your joy this day
and let me be made pure
in the well of your health.



Free prayers of thanks

The Lord's Prayer

Scripture readings

Silence

*Reflect on the gospel
and on the Christ of the cross,
suffering in the world
with all those who are broken.*



Intercessions

O Christ of the road
of the wounded,
O Christ of the tears
of the broken,
in me and with me
the needs of the world.

Grant me my prayers
of loving and hoping.
Grant me my prayers
of yearning for healing.

*Pray for the coming day
and for healing
within and among all people.*



Closing prayer

God before me, God behind me,
God above me, God beneath me.
I on your path, O God,
you, O God, on my way.
In the twistings of the road
in the currents of the river
be with me by day
be with me by night
be with me by day and by night.



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