

Passing Through the Gate of Glory

A Glimpse at the Daily Life
of Celtic Christians



Compiled primarily from prayers, hymns and rites in
Carmina Gadelica
And, when noted, from tales and prayers from
Hebridean Altars.

The Celtic Way of Prayer

Christians from the Celtic lands of Brittany, the Isle of Mann, Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and England saw no distinction between sacred and secular. There is only the sacred. In like manner, their daily lives were not divided into sectors. All aspects of life were filled with awareness of God and became a single venue for prayer. Life was a pilgrimage into the heart of God and this path of prayer was integrated into the rhythms and patterns of family life, work, the seasons of the year and the Sundays, holy days and celebrations of the local church.

The natural world was a “feast prepared by God”, even in the midst of life’s dangers, evil and hardships. Human beings are guests at God’s table which serves saints and sinners alike. There is no aspect of creation which does not embody God’s presence and power. The powers of nature bring both life and danger, yet all being remains in the hands of God.

Celtic Christians were firmly Christ-centered in their prayer and realistic about their own failures and sins. They faced the challenges and conflicts of life with a firm dependence of the presence and power of the risen Christ. They were aware of God’s power

and love as Creator, Redeemer and Spirit and wove the presence of the Sacred Three into every facet of daily life.

The selections in this booklet represent a small sample of this Celtic Way of Prayer. They have been chosen and organized by David Keller from the following sources:

Alexander Carmichael. *Carmina Gadelica, Hymns and Incantations Collected in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the Nineteenth Century*. Published by Lindisfarne Press, 1992. RR 4, Box 94A-1, Hudson, NY 12534. ISBN 0-940262-50-9.

Alistair MacLean. *Hebridean Altars*. Published by Moray Press, 1937.

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All Celtic graphics by David Keller.



The Day

My Shield

For my shield this day I
call:

Heaven's might
Sun's brightness
Moon's whiteness.
Fire's glory
Lightning's swiftness
Wind's wildness
Ocean's depth
Earth's solidity
Rock's immobility.

Strong power of the
seraphim with angels
obeying,
And archangels
attending,
In the glorious
company of the holy
and risen ones,
In the prayers of fathers
and mothers,
In visions prophetic and
commands apostolic,
In the annals of witness,
In virginal innocence,
In the deeds of steadfast
men and women.

Prayer at Rising

Bless to me, O God
Each thing mine eye
sees,
Bless to me, O God each
sound my ear hears,
Bless to me, O God each
odor that goes to my
nostrils,
Bless to me, O God each
taste that goes to my
lips,
Each note that goes to
my song,
Each ray that guides my
way,
Each thing that I
pursue,
Each lure that tempts my
will,
The zeal that seeks my
living soul,
The Three that seek my
heart,
The zeal that seeks my
living soul,
The Three that seek my
heart.

Blessing of the Kindling

I will kindle my fire this morning
 In the presence of the holy angles of heaven,
 In the presence of Ariel of the loveliest form,
 In the presence of Uriel of the myriad charms,
 Without malice, without jealousy, without envy,
 Without fear, without terror of anyone under the sun,
 But the Holy son of God to shield me,
 Without malice, without jealousy, without envy,
 Without fear, without terror of anyone under the sun
 But the Holy Son of God to shield me.

God, kindle Thou in my heart within
 A flame of love to my neighbor,
 To my foe, to my friend, to my kindred all,
 To the brave, to the knave, to the thrall,
 O Son of loveliest Mary,
 From the lowliest thing that lives,
 To the Name that is highest of all.
 O Son of loveliest Mary,
 From the loveliest thing that lives,
 To the Name that is highest of all.

Bathing Prayer

A palmful for thine age,
 A palmful for thy growth,
 A palmful for thy throat,
 A flood for thy appetite.
 The three palmfuls of the Secret Three,
 To preserve thee from every envy, evil eye and death;
 The palmful of the God of Life,
 The palmful of the Christ of Love,
 The palmful of the Spirit of Peace,

Triune of Grace.

Prayer at Dressing

Bless to me, O God, my soul and my body;
Bless to me, O God, my belief and my condition;

Bless to me, O God, my heart and my speech;
And bless to me, O God, the handling of my hand.

Strength and busyness of morning,
Habit and temper of modesty,
Force and wisdom of thought,
And Thine own path, O God of virtues,
Till I go to sleep this night;
Thine own path, O God of virtues,
Till I go to sleep this night.

Blessing of the Smoothing of the Fire

I am smoothing the fire as the Son of Mary would smoo;,
Blest be the house, blest be the fire,
Blest be the people all.

Who are those down on the floor?
John and Peter and Paul.
On whom is the vigil tonight?
On the fair gentle Mary and on her Son.

The mouth of God said,
The angel of God spake,
An angel in the door of the house,
To guard and to keep us all,
Till comes daylight tomorrow.

Smoooring the Fire

The Sacred Three,
 To save, to shield, to surround
 the hearth, the house, the household;
 This eve, this night, Oh! This eve, this night,
 And every night, each single night. Amen.

Bed Blessing

I am lying down tonight,
 With Mary mild and with her Son,
 With the Mother of my King,
 Who is shielding me from harm.

I will not lie down with evil,
 Nor shall evil lie down with me,
 But I will lie down with God,
 And God will lie down with me.



The Seasons

A Prayer for Sowing Seed

I will go out to sow the seed,
 In the name of Him who gave it growth;
 I will place my front in the wind,
 And throw a gracious handful on high.
 Should a grain fall on a bare rock
 It shall have no soil in which to grow;
 As much as falls into the earth
 The dew will make it to be full.
 Friday, day auspicious,
 The dew will come down to welcome
 Every seed that lay in sleep.

A Reaping Blessing

God, bless Thou Thyself my reaping,
 Each ridge, and plain, and field,
 Each sickle curved, shapely, hard,
 Each ear and handful in the sheaf,

Each ear and handful in the sheaf.

Bless each maiden and youth,
 each woman and tender youngling,
 Safeguard them beneath Thy shield of strength,
 And guard them in the house of the saints,
 Guard them in the house of the saints.

Encompass each goat, sheep and lamb,
 Each cow and horse, and store,
 Surround Thou the flocks and herds,
 And tend them to a kindly fold,
 Tend them to a kindly fold.
 For the sake of Michael, head of hosts,
 Of Mary fair-skinned branch of grace,
 Of Bride smooth-white of ringleted locks,
 Of Columba of the graves and tombs,
 Columba of the graves and tombs.

Driving the Cows

Closed to you be every pit,
 smooth to you be every hill,
 Snug to you be every bare spot,
 beside the cold mountains.

The sanctuary of Mary Mother be yours,
 The sanctuary of Brigit the loved be yours,
 The sanctuary of Michael victorious be yours,
 Active and full be you gathered home.

The protection of shapely Cormac be yours,
 The protection of Brendan of the ship be yours,

The protection of Maol Duinne the saint be yours
In marshy ground and rocky ground.

The fellowship of Mary Mother be yours,
The fellowship of Brigit of kine be yours,
The fellowship of Michael victorious be yours,
In nibbling, in chewing, in munching.

Spring and Fall Herding Blessing

Traveling moorland, traveling townland,
Traveling mossland long and wide,
Be the herding of God the Son about your feet,
Safe and whole may ye home return,
Be the herding of God the Son about your feet,
Safe and whole may ye home return.

The sanctuary of Carmac and of Columba
Be protecting you going and coming,
And of the milkmaid of the soft palms,
Bride of the clustering hair golden brown,
And of the milkmaid of the soft palms,
Bride of the clustering hair golden brown.

New Moon

(A Prayer for Light in Dark Nights of Sky and Soul)

There, see, the new moon, the King of life blessing her,
Fragrant be every night whereon she shall shine.

Be her luster full, to each one in need;
Be her course complete to each one beset.

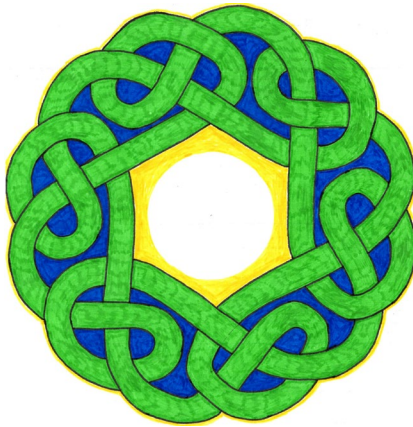
Be her light above with everyone in straits;

Be her guidance below with everyone in need.

May the moon of moons be coming through thick clouds
On me, and on every one coming through dark tears.

May God's hand on me dwell in every strait that me
befalls, now and till the hour of my death,
And till the day of my resurrection.

The Rhythm of Christ-centered Living



Caim Prayers

(The Gaelic word “caim” means an encircling or encompassing presence and refers, also, to a bodily motion accompanying a prayer in which the right arm is raised heavenward while the body moves or rotates in a circle, sunwise, to invoke the presence, blessing and protection of God.)

Jesus the Encircler

Jesu! Only-begotten Son and Lamb of God the Father,
Thou didst give the wine-blood of Thy body to buy me
from the grave.

My Christ! My Christ! My shield, my encircler,
Each day, each night, each light, each dark;
My Christ! My Christ! My shield, my encircler,
Each day, each night, each light, each dark.

Be near me, uphold me, my treasure, my triumph,
In my lying, in my standing, in my watching in my
sleeping.

Jesu, Son of Mary! My helper, my encircler,
Jesu, Son of David, my strength everlasting;
Jesu, Son of Mary! My helper, my encircler,
Jesu, Son of David! My strength everlasting.

A Prayer for Encompassing

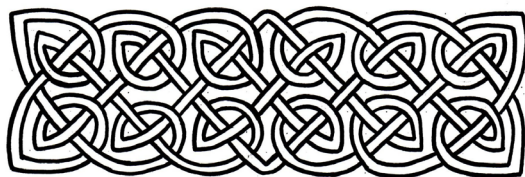
The compassing of God and His right hand,
 Be upon my form and upon my frame;
 The compassing of the High King and the grace
 of the Trinity
 Be upon me abiding ever eternally,
 Be upon me abiding ever eternally.

May the compassing of the Three shield me in my
 means,
 The compassing of the Three shield me this day,
 The compassing of the Three shield me this night
 From hate, from harm, from act, from ill,
 From hate, from harm, from act, from ill.

A Caim Prayer

The caim of God be on thee,
 The caim of the God of life.
 The caim of Christ be on thee,
 The caim of the Christ of love.
 The caim of Spirit be on thee,
 The caim of the Spirit of Grace.
 The caim of the Three be on thee,
 The caim of the Three preserve thee,
 The caim of the Three preserve thee.

Prayers for the Journeys of Life



Relief from Suffering

Relieve Thou, O God, each one
In suffering on land and sea,
In grief or wounded or weeping,
And lead them to the House of Thy peace
this night.

I am weary, weak and cold,
I am weary of traveling land and sea,
I am weary of traversing moorland and billow,
Grant me peace in the nearness of Thy repose
This night.

Beloved Father of my God,
Accept the caring for my tears;
I would wish reconciliation with Thee,
Through the witness and the ransom of Thy Son;

To be resting with Jesus
In the dwelling of peace,
In the paradise of gentleness,
In the fairy-bower of mercy.

The Journey Prayer

God, bless to me this day,

God, bless to me this night;
 Bless, O bless, Thou God of grace,
 Each day and hour of my life;
 Bless, O bless, Thou God of grace,
 Each day and hour of my life.

God, bless the pathway on which I go,
 God, bless the earth that is beneath my soul;
 Bless, O God, and give to me Thy love,
 O God of gods, bless my rest and my repose;
 Bless, O God, and give to me Thy love,
 And bless, O God of gods, my repose.

The Journey Blessing

Bless to me, O God, the earth beneath my foot,
 Bless to me, O God, the path whereon I go,
 Bless to me, O God, the thing of my desire;
 Thou Evermore of evermore,
 Bless to me my rest.

Bless to me the thing whereon is set my mind,
 Bless to me whereon is set my love;
 Bless to me the thing whereon is set my hope;
 O Thou King of Kings,
 Bless Thou to me mine eye!

The Pilgrim's Aiding

God be with thee in every pass,
 Jesus be with thee on every hill,
 Spirit be with thee on every stream,
 Headland and ridge and lawn.
 Each sea and land, each moor and meadow,
 Each lying down and rising up,

In the trough of the waves, on crest of the
billows,
Each step of the journey thou goest.

Blessings

May the eye of the great God be upon you,
The eye of the God of glory be on you,
The eye of the Son of Mary Virgin be on you,
The eye of the Spirit mild be on you,
To aid you and to shepherd you;
 Oh kindly eye of the Three be on you,
 To aid you and to shepherd you.

The caim of the King of life be yours,
The caim of loving Christ be yours,
The caim of Holy Spirit be yours
Unto the crown of the life eternal
 Unto the crown of the life ternal.
My own blessing be with you,
The blessing of God be with you,
The blessing of Spirit be with you
 And with your children,
 With you and with your children.

May the Spirit satisfy you,
With the water of grace.

Daily Living and Dying

To be Centered in Christ

The shape of Christ be towards me,
 The shape of Christ be to me,
 The shape of Christ be before me,
 The shape of Christ be behind me,
 The shape of Christ be over me,
 The shape of Christ be under me,
 The shape of Christ be with me,
 The shape of Christ be around me,
 On Monday and on Sunday;
 The shape of Christ be around me,
 On Monday and on Sunday.

To be Pure in Heart

May mildness be on my lips,
 May kindness be on my face,
 May chasteness be in my desire,
 May wisdom be in my purpose.

Prayers for Personal Confession

A cause of grief is sin.
 A cause of anguish is death.
 A cause of joy is repentance
 And cleansing in the river of health.

There will be joy among the angels of heaven
 That I am laved in the pool of confession.
 O my soul be joyful,
 God is willing to be reconciled to thee,
 Seize His hand while it is stretched out
 To announce to thee a loving reconciliation.

A Prayer of Resolve

God's will would I do;

my own will bridle.

God's due would I give;
my own due yield.

God's path I would travel;
my own path refuse.

Christ's death I would ponder;
my own death remember;

Christ's agony I would meditate;
my love to God make warmer.

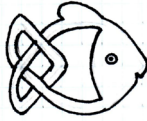
Christ's cross I would carry;
my own cross forget.
Repentance of sin would I make;
early repentance choose.

A bridle to my tongue I would put;
a bridle on my thoughts I would keep.

God's judgement would I judge;
my own judgement guard.

Christ's redemption I would seize;
my own ransom work.

The love of Christ would I feel;
my own love know.



A Baptismal Prayer ¹

When a child comes into the world, the kneewom puts three drops of water on the forehead of the poor little infant, who has come to us from the bosom of the everlasting Father. And the woman does this in the name and in the reverence of the kind and powerful Trinity. With each of the three drops of water the child is handed across the fire and then carried sunwise around the fire as the kneewoman says:

In the name of God,
In the name of Jesus,
In the name of Spirit,
The perfect Three of power.

A small drop of water
To thy forehead, beloved,
Meet for the Father, Son and Spirit,
The Triune of power.

A small drop of water
To encompass my beloved,
Meet for the Father, Son, and Spirit,
The Triune of power.

A small drop of water,
To fill thee with each grace,

Meet for the Father, Son and Spirit,
The Triune of power.

The little drop of the Three
To fill thee with Their virtue,
O the little drop of the Three
To fill thee with Their virtue.

A Great Cloud of Fellow Pilgrims Guiding the Way

Oh may each saint and sainted woman in heaven,
O God of the creatures and God of goodness,
Be taking charge of you in every strait
Every side and every turn you go.

Be each saint in heaven,
Each sainted woman in heaven,
Each angel in heaven
Stretching their arms for you,
Smoothing the way for you,
When you go hither
Over the river hard to see;
 Oh when you go thither home
 Over the river hard to see.

A Prayer After Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ

Heaven is intertwined with earth. Alleluia!
We have taken the divine life into ourselves. Alleluia!
And so now each may say:
I rise up clothed in the strength of Christ.

I shall not be imprisoned; I shall not be harmed.
 I shall not be down-trodden, I shall not be left alone;
 I shall not be tainted, I shall not be overwhelmed;
 I go clothed in Christ's white garments;
 I go freed to weave Christ's patterns;
 I go loved to serve Christ's weak ones;
 I go armed with Christ's truth and compassion. ²

A Prayer as Death Approaches

Since Thou Christ it was who didst buy the soul –
 At the time of yielding the life,
 At the time of pouring the sweat,
 At the time of offering the clay,
 At the time of shedding the blood,
 At the time of balancing the beam,
 At the time of severing the breath,
 At the time of delivering the judgement,
 Be its peace upon Thine own ingathering;
 Jesus Christ, Son of gentle Mary,
 Be its peace upon Thine own ingathering,
 O Jesus! Upon Thine own ingathering.

And may Michael white kindly,
 High king of holy angels,
 Take possession of the beloved soul,
 And shield it home to the Three of surpassing love,
 Oh! To the Three of surpassing love.

God Present in All Creation

The Fullness of God

I have a secret joy in Thee, my God.
 Thou art my Father,
 Thou art my Mother, too.
 And of Thy tenderness and healing and patience
 There is no end at all. ³

God Dwells Within

For every thought of beauty:
 For every thought that yields the vision
 Of the inner quiet which may be ours
 Through our glad acceptance of it:
 For every thought
 Which cast the light of Thy purpose
 Upon the pilgrim way
 We make Thee praise. ⁴

God is Everywhere

The Milking Croon ⁵

Finding nothing common or unclean, we
 Highland people sense Divinity everywhere, in opal
 dawns and quiet seas: in trusty friendship and in
 cleansing laughter: in food and drink, in glistening fish,
 or in the flesh of deer. "We are God's guests", said a
 pious man of the isle of Lewis, "and 'tis He who keeps
 the generous table". It is not surprising, therefore, that in
 a simpler age the women crooned a heart-blessing and
 God's blessing on even the frothing milk:

White foam of milk,
 Be life to me, and life to mine, who drink thy wine.
 Most sacred Three,
 With blessing bend over this gift your care doth send.

one. Tell me the secret of your exceeding gentleness". At this the lady mused for long, her eyes downcast; then answered softly as one waking from a lovely dream, "There is no secret...only...only I am always at His feet, and He is always in my heart."

Endnotes

¹ From *Hebridean Altars*. Alistair MacLean. Moray Press, 1937.

² From *A Eucharist in the Celtic Tradition*, St. Aidan Trust, Red Hill Christian Center, Snitterfield, Stratford-on-Avon, CV37 0PQ, England.

³ From *Hebridean Altars*.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.