

Lorica, Caim,
Cross Vigil,
and
Meditatio
Prayers
of Celtic Christians



An Irish hermit's poem about his life of prayer. (9th cent.)

All alone in my little hut without a human being in my company, dear has been the pilgrimage before going to meet death.

A remote hidden hut for the forgiveness of my sins, a conscience upright and spotless before Holy Heaven.

Making holy the body with good habits, treading it boldly down; feeble tearful eyes for forgiveness of my passions.

Passions weak and withered, renunciation of this world, clean live thoughts; this is my prayer to God.

Eager wailings to cloudy heaven, sincere and truly devout confession, fervent showers of tears.

A cold fearful bed, like the lying down of the doomed, a brief anxious sleep, cries frequent and early.

My food to suit my condition; my meal would not make me full-blooded, without doubt.

Dry bread measured out, well we bow the head; water of the fair-hued hillside, that is the draught I would drink.

A bitter meager meal, diligently feeding the sick, suppression of quarrelling and visiting, a bright calm conscience.

Stepping along the paths of the gospel, singing psalms every hour; an end of talking and long stories; constant bending of the knees.

My Creator to frequent me, my Lord, my King, my spirit to seek him in the eternal kingdom where he is.

This is the end of vice among mansions, a lovely little place full of tombs and I alone here.

All alone in my little hut, all alone so, alone I came into the world, alone I shall go from it.

If of my own I have done wrong at all through the pride of this world, hear my wail for it all alone, O God!

Constant prayers for those who love you...

Hymns for the soul standing...

Good occupations during the day: prayer, labor and reading.

Follow charity above everything...

Do not sleep till you think it time...

A Lorica Prayer

The Lorica prayer is usually completed twice; once with eyes cast down, and a second time with eyes cast up toward the sky. The following sequence begins facing EAST and is repeated at each of the other three cardinal directions, moving sunwise:

- Stand with arms at side.
- Bring arms to chest with palms and fingers together in traditional prayer posture.
- Bow deeply.
- Rise and make the sign of the cross (using a chant if desired).
- Recite the Lord's Prayer slowly.
- Recite: O God, come to my assistance;
O Lord, make haste to help me.
- Repeat both recitations at the other three cardinal directions.
- When both sequences (with eyes upward and eyes downward) are completed, bow deeply and stand quietly with arms resting at sides.

"The elders formerly called the cross-vigil 'The Breastplate of Devotion'. They used to perform the 'Shrine of Piety' after the cross-vigil of the Pater Noster, and this was how they did it: first they recited the Pater, facing eastwards, and Deus in adjutorium as far as festina three times, with their hands outside their robes raised high to heaven. They did not, however, perform the cross-vigil as was done after meals. Then they made the sign of the cross, facing eastwards, with the right hand. Then they did likewise facing each one of the four points of the compass, once more facing the ground, and finally once looking up to heaven. This entire ceremony was called Luirech leiri, the Shrine of Devotion."

(The Rule of Tallaght – Irish - 8th century)

Caim Prayers

The Gaelic word “caim” refers to an encircling or encompassing presence. It can be both a verbal prayer and a bodily motion accompanying a verbal prayer in which the right arm is raised heavenward, while the body rotates in a circle, sunwise. A caim prayer invokes the presence, blessing and protection of God. A caim may be prayed, also, by walking around a home, a room, a person, a flock, etc.

Here is a delightful account of St. Ninian of Whithorn in Strathclyde (now Scotland) using his body in a caim prayer for those who assisted in his monastery’s work, including animals:

“The most holy Ninian liked to visit his herds and the huts of his shepherds, desiring that the flocks which were kept for the use of the brethren and the poor and the pilgrims should partake of the Episcopal blessing. And so, the animals having been brought together in one place, when the servant of the Lord, Ninian, had looked upon them, with uplifted hands he commended himself and all of his to divine protection. Then walking round them as it were drawing a circle with his staff on which he leant, he confided all within the enclosure to peaceful rest throughout the night under divine protection.”

(From St. Aelred’s Life of Ninian)

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.

A Format for a Caim Prayer

Circle (name...), Lord,

Keep (comfort...protection...light) near,

And (discouragement...despair...darkness...) afar.

Keep (peace...hope...trust) within

And (turmoil...despair...anxiety) without.

The eternal Holy One, Son and Spirit

Shield (name...) on every side.

The Sacred Three

Wrap and seal (her/him) in holy zeal.

A Cross Vigil

A vigil is a physical and mental position of expectation, openness and waiting. It is prayer or silence awaiting a liturgical feast such as a Sunday or Easter as well as a general letting go of agenda and activity to place one's self in God's presence.

The following form of prayer comes directly to Celtic lands from the praxis of the desert abbas and ammas in Christian monastic communities in Egypt, beginning in the late 3rd century.

- Stand facing EAST with arms at sides.
- Bring arms to chest with palms and fingers together in traditional prayer posture.
- Bow deeply.
- Raise body from bow and extend arms out from sides to form a cross.
- Stand in cross vigil silently or repeating a chant or verse from Scripture.
- Stay in the cross vigil position beyond the point when it becomes tiresome, as long as you are able.
- Then, bring arms to chest with palms and fingers together in traditional prayer posture.
- Bow deeply.
- Raise body from bow and let arms rest as sides.
- Breathe deeply to end cross vigil.

Suggested verses for recitation during vigil:

O God, come to my assistance;
O Lord, make haste to help me.

For those who want to save their life will lose it,
and those who lose their life for my sake will
find it.

Meditatio

The Egyptian desert abbas and ammas, whether hermits or living in community, recited verses of Scripture during periods of labor. Many of them wove mats, rope and baskets to earn money for food and to give offerings to the needy. As they worked they let the verses they recited be woven into their work and their souls. In this form of prayer God is experienced directly through Scripture, simply through recitation and naked openness, rather than study, discussion or intentional reflection. Different forms of *meditatio* were woven into the lives of Celtic monks and laity.

“The following is the custom of the Celi De. One of them reads aloud the Gospels, the rules and the lives of the saints, while the rest are eating, that the minds of the monks may be centered on God rather than on food.”

(From the Rule of the Celi De – Irish – 9th century)

*Delightful I think it to be in the bosom of an isle
On the crest of a rock
That I may look there on the manifold
Face of the sea...*

*That I may pour on one of my books,
Good for the soul,
A while kneeling for beloved heaven.
A while at the psalms...*

*A while meditating upon the Prince of Heaven,
Holy is the redemption,
A while at labor not too heavy,
It would be delightful!*

(From the Song of Manchin of Liath – Irish - 9th century)

Choose a short portion, or verse, from a Gospel or a psalm and recite it regularly during the day.

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Compiled and arranged by
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