



Reflection for February 3, 2021 St. Brigid of Kildare (Transferred)

‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? [Matthew 6:25]

Brigid of Kildare is one of the most beloved saints of the Irish tradition, second only to Patrick. Born about 450, she died in 523 in Kildare at the monastery she had founded at Kildare, the first double monastery for men and women.

The daughter of a member of the king’s court, she was raised in a Druid household. The many tales about the miracles she performed reflect the blending of pagan and Christian cultures that is part of the richness of Celtic Christianity. The two symbols most often associated with her- the woven cross and the fire—synthesize these traditions. Prior to the founding of the monastery, Kildare had been the site of the cult of a pagan goddess where there was a sacred fire that Brigid’s community continue to cultivate – hence the image of the bowl of fire and the importance of the symbol of fire in depictions of Brigid. As to the cross, the story is told that while Brigid sat by the bedside of a dying chieftain, she picked up some straw from the floor and while weaving a cross from it told the story of the cross, which brought peace to the chieftain.

Two lessons in particular can be found in the stories about the life of Brigid. First, all the miracles attributed to her were gifts of compassion that surprised the supplicant. For example, a woman with leprosy asked for a cup of milk, and Brigid healed her. Brigid embodies a vision of the interconnected that we seek in our calls for environmental stewardship, racial justice, economic equity and civil discourse. Brigid lived at the center of this interconnectedness; it was the ground of her compassion and of the peace she offered to people whose lives, like ours, were darkened by worry and isolation.

Secondly, Brigid teaches us to see different faith traditions as different languages about the presence of God, a mystery that cannot be put into words. The peace of God’s presence is both at our fingertips and ever elusive. Brigid teaches us to listen watchfully, ready to be surprised and assured. Seamus Heaney describes beautifully the freedom to which Brigid’s faith-filled and compassion leads us:

From ***Crossings*** by Seamus Heaney

*On St. Brigid's Day the new life could be entered
by going through her girdle of straw rope.
The proper way for men was right leg first
then right arm and right shoulder, head, then left
shoulder, arm and leg.
Women drew it down
over the body and stepped out of it.
The open they came into by these moves
stood opener, hoops came off the world.
They could feel the February air
still soft above their heads and imagine
the limp rope fray and flare like wind-born gleanings
or an unhindered goldfinch over ploughland.*