

# CELTIC CONTEMPLATIVE PILGRIMAGE IN IRELAND



"YOU RIDE ON THE WINGS OF THE WIND, YOU MAKE THE WINDS YOUR MESSENGER."  
PSALM 104:3-4

"TO WALK THE CELTIC PATH IS TO BE EMBRACED BY THE ELEMENTAL NATURE OF GOD, WHO IS THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF ALL LIFE."

GREG VALERIO

How do we encounter Christ in creation, in the mundane, as well as in the darkness of our own hearts? Come explore with us the dynamic roots of Celtic Christianity and attune your hearts to hear the rhythm of God in and through all things, "a music that resembles an earlier music that men are born remembering." C.S. Lewis

Come join us near the village of Cong, a small village in the deep south of County Mayo nestled between Lough Corrib and Lough Mask that attracts



thousands of tourists every year. It is famous for being the film location of John Wayne's *The Quiet Man*, home to 13th C. Ashford Castle, and the gateway to the Connemara. It also holds an incredibly rich history. The Cong Abbey, originally founded in the 7th C. by St. Fechin, had at

its height 3000 members and was home to the last High King of Ireland. While the Abbey is now in ruins, Cong's spiritual heritage is still impacting the land and the people who pass through as many remark on its beauty and peaceful atmosphere.

The Celtic Tradition perceives God's presence in and through creation, the mundane and domestic details of life. We will explore together how this tradition can enrich our current journeys with God through learning sessions, the contemplative practices and exploring the wonder of creation around us.

### **TRAVEL:**

Everyone will need to arrive on Tuesday, September 11th. Our Pilgrimage will begin Wednesday morning, though technically you really started once you left home! You have 3







airport options for arrival to Cong, Co. Mayo: Dublin (DUB), Shannon (SNN) and Knock (NOC). Dublin might be the cheapest, but it is furthest away from the pilgrimage site. We can send you an info sheet on instructions regarding how to get from each airport to Cong.

### **COST:**

The Pilgrimage cost is 350 Dollars US. This covers a small part of the preparatory work and materials required for the pilgrimage. Everyone will cover their own travel costs, meal expenses and lodging. Our B&B averages 40-50 Euros per person per night. Food costs will depend on your taste and budget - breakfast will be provided at the B&B for 7.50 Euros & you could plan on 15-20 Euros per person per day for our other meals.



# **THE CELTIC PATH - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

## **“AND THROUGH HIM ALL LIFE HAS COME INTO BEING”**

### **GOSPEL OF JOHN**

To understand Celtic Christianity, is to take a step outside of modernity and the constraints secular materialism has placed upon us through a post-industrial western civilisation and actively enter into the primal creative world of the Spirit of God. To walk the Celtic path is to be embraced by the elemental nature of God, who is the primary source of all life.

For the Celtic monks of Britain and Ireland, God was not an intellectual concept or right doctrine. God was the immediate eternally present one in the very activities of daily living with prayers for milking cows, herding cattle and spinning on looms. The dynamic eternal person, the Three in One, was to be encountered in the simple faith of his followers. As St. Columba taught, 'Be naked in your imitation of Christ and the Evangelists'.



Our prayer is the fullness of the human soul exposed to the power and intimate love of the Father. It is a prayer that embraces the internal contemplative journey and ascetic discipline. This path of prayer, however, was not for the faint-hearted or for those who are inclined to the domestic comforts of hearth and home. It was the voice located in the wilderness, the pursuit of God's love on the open ocean, as the story of the Voyage of St. Brendan demonstrates. It was long night vigils of St. Cuthbert in the cold North Sea off the shores of Lindesfarne, or the stone pillow of St. Columba. What was a small temporal discomfort in this life compared with the agony of Christ's crucifixion for all creation?

For our Celtic heroes, to be embraced by Christ, was to commit to the call to journey home. The act of peregrinatio was recognition that life is merely a temporary road we walk on as we make our way home. As St. Columbanus teaches:

Let us not love the road rather than our home, for our home is such that we should love it. Let us keep to this principle, therefore, that we should live as travellers and pilgrims on the road, as guests of the world, free of lusts and earthly desires, but let us fill our minds with heavenly and spiritual forms, singing with grace and power.



For the Celtic saints the call was to travel light, to not be bogged down by the cares of the world, to live simply and to avoid the seductions of material wealth, personal comfort and ego, lest the cares of the world prevent you from entering the gates of heaven.

## **OUR PILGRIMAGE**

On this retreat we will begin to open ourselves up to the living reality of the deep mysteries of God to be found in the Celtic tradition. We will do this through prayer, meditation and the practice of the Poet's bed, the early Irish practice of encountering God in the darkness and discovering our true name and poem/prophecy/identity in the Holy Trinity.



As we scratch the surface of Celtic Spirituality, my prayer is we will begin to enter the place of the divine Holy Trinity, the Holy place, the place of the Creator's originating fire, a place we can truly call home.

Written by Greg Valerio.

Jeff, Roger, Debbie, Greg, Chris & Erin are personal friends and Pilgrimage Directors in Axiom Monastic Community (AMC).