

# GROWING Together

14th Series

## CLOSER TO GOD: A CELTIC WAY

The ancient Celts practised a marvelous form of prayer which called God into every part of daily life. This intentional reminder that God is ever present can be called incarnational prayer: revealing the connection of the divine with everyday life.

*I arise today through the strength of heaven: Light of sun, Radiance of moon,  
Splendour of fire, Speed of lightning, Swiftness of wind, Depth of sea,  
Stability of earth, Firmness of rock.*<sup>1</sup>

Incarnation means literally to put flesh on, or to be given bodily form. As Christians we celebrate the incarnation in Jesus Christ, God made human. Jesus himself used incarnational language. He spoke of God being like *the woman who lost a coin*, or a *shepherd who followed the lost sheep*. He compared the kingdom to a *mustard seed*. Kathleen Norris says, “Incarnational language might be defined as ordinary words that resonate with the senses as they aim for the stars.”<sup>2</sup>

*Walker of the Night Stars, Guardian of the Hearth, Keeper of the Deep  
Places, May I sleep in you this night.*<sup>3</sup>

The God of the Celts is not found in a statement of faith but in “... this vivid sense of a God who knows, loves, supports, is close at hand, and actually present in their lives.”<sup>4</sup> Celtic prayer invites God into the personal life, whatever shape that takes, and encourages the connection of the divine within and without. Ancient Celtic tradition meant that, from the lighting of the fire in the early morning until the settling of the house at night, prayers were said for all activities:

*Mothers of our mother, Foremothers strong, Guide our hands in yours,  
Remind us how to kindle the hearth, to keep it bright, to preserve the flame,  
Your hands upon ours, Our hand within yours, to kindle the light both day  
and night.*<sup>1</sup>

Celtic prayer originally came out of a culture immersed in its relationship to the divine. We, of course, live in different times not so open to constant prayer. We believe “facts” are truth. Yet we can begin to know the truth of God who is ever present through recognizing our own experience as holy. Following Celtic tradition, nothing is seen as outside the blessing of God. Can we find the prayer to bless our computers, our mini-vans, our containers of microwave food, our designer jeans?

*Even as I clothe my body with wool, cover Thou my soul with the shadow of  
Thy wing.*<sup>4</sup>

The miracle of this kind of attentiveness to God is the tremendous sense of thankfulness which seeps through every part of Celtic life. Our culture teaches us that owning things leads to happiness. The Celtic practice of incarnational prayer leads to a deep and truly fulfilling relationship to the Source of life.

*Bless to me, O God, Each thing mine eye sees;  
Bless to me, O God, Each sound mine ear hears;  
Bless to me, O God, Each odour 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 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.*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Caitlin Matthews, *The Little Book of Celtic Blessings*, (Element Books, 1994), pp. 17, 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Christian Century*, July 30 - August 6, 1997, p. 699.

<sup>3</sup> Caitlin Matthews, *Celtic Devotional*, (Harmony Books, 1996), p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Esther de Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, (Doubleday, 1997), pp. 70, 77, 76.

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