

## St. Patrick's Day

March 17, 2018

I am the grandson of Nell O'Brien, a first generation immigrant from Ireland. Her blood flows through mine and connects me with the ancient ethos that historians and archaeologists call Celtic. The Celtic people had developed a spirituality and philosophy long before they were introduced to the Christian faith by St. Patrick. Their ancient religion taught them a reverence for the world around them: the soil beneath their feet, the waters that surrounded the island that was their home, and the heavens filled with the wonders and beauty of the divine gods. This life, and this earth was not a fallen or cursed place, but one in which they communed and lived alongside the invisible world filled with the presence of the saints, their ancestors, the faery folk who lived in the earth, and those who lived amidst the clouds. The world was alive and filled with the wonder of God and Goddess.

When Patrick became a slave, kidnapped from England and sold in Ireland when he was young, the impact of his captors did not fill him with bitterness or disdain, but admiration. Which is why years after his escape and return to England, Patrick returned to Ireland as a Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church. Others had attempted to bring the Gospel from England to Ireland, but it was Patrick, who understood and honored the culture and people from whom he had received much wisdom, he hoped to bring the light and wisdom of Jesus Christ. God was certainly with Patrick as he preached the message of faith, hope, and love – Grace, Mercy, and compassion – prayer – devotion – and community; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – it was the message of God's incarnation upon the earth that the Celts already believed and peacefully received as Patrick shared the message of God's love and relationship with all the earth through his son, Jesus Christ.

Christianity took root in Ireland and was allowed to emerge and organize primarily through its indigenous Celtic spirituality and ethos for the first three hundred years of the church in Ireland. The faith was lived in community that resulted in both monastic orders and family clans that were not hierarchical or authoritarian but were devoted to the whole development of their society. It was the Celtic Church's love of wisdom, learning, and human development that Thomas Cahill, credits for saving civilization by hiding and safeguarding collections of ancient and classic literature and scrolls while the western world was being ravaged by invaders following the fourth century.

I was first introduced to the Celtic Christian tradition soon after my own son, Sawyer was born, to whom we gave the name O'Brien as a middle name. Maybe it earned me an Irish blessing from Nell when I kept her name alive by giving it to my son. Perhaps it was she who directed my attention to a little paperback book of daily prayers from the Celtic Community in Northumbria. And perhaps it was she who stilled my mind to sit for two hours and read prayer after prayer; story after story; to return me to my own roots and connection to Celtic spirituality and wisdom that sees the divine in the ordinary, the

beauty all around and within, and the deep sense of connectedness and belonging that we all share in creation.

May the God who brings rain from the heavens and nourishment from the earth fill your own mind and heart with the love of life.

May the Incarnation of God revealed so powerfully and true in Jesus Christ, awaken you to the incarnation of God in you.

And, may each day that is created by the divine artist, be known in all of its beauty and wonder through all of your senses, and may you find your place amidst the time and landscape in which you have emerged.

Amen