

ST COLUMBA OF IRELAND

521AD-597AD



St Columba is the patron Saint of both our school and Parish. But who was this man, our school and Parish were named after?

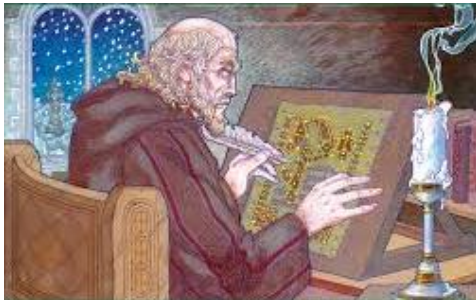
There are many legends told about Columba, but there is also some historical data concerning his many works.

Columba was a man of tremendous energy who many considered a warrior Priest.

St Columba was born Colum MacFergus, in Ireland in 521 A.D. He was the great-great-grandson of an Irish king. Columba, had the potential to become a king in Ireland, but instead, chose to give his full service to the mission of the King of heaven.



Early in life Columba showed scholarly and clerical ability. He entered the monastic life, and almost immediately set forth on missionary travels. Even before ordination in 551, he had founded monasteries at Derry and Durrow, and is said to have founded as many as 300 churches and monasteries during his lifetime.



St. Columba was one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland. Those twelve were saints who studied under St. Finian at Clonary Abbey.

Columba was known for constant study and prayer - really, really constant. He is said to have written 300 books, by hand of course, continuing to transcribe up to the night before he died.



Finian and Columba got into a disagreement over a psalter. (A psalter is a book containing Psalms) Columba borrowed the manuscript from Finian, possibly without permission and secretly copied it with the intention of keeping it for his own use. But Finian found out and said that this was theft. He demanded that Columba hand over the copy he had made.

Finian took the matter to the High King of Ireland.

Finian's argument was simple: My book. You can't copy it.

Columba's response was that "It is not right, that the divine words in that book should not be shared among all the tribes."

He told the King that those who owned the knowledge through books should spread the knowledge by copying and sharing them. He felt that to not share knowledge was a far greater offense than to copy a book that lost nothing by being copied.

But the king ruled in Finian's favour, famously saying, "To every cow belongs its calf; to every book its copy." In other words, every copy of a book belonged to the owner of the original book.

The dispute eventually led to a great battle, during which many men were killed—perhaps as many as 3000.



As penance for these deaths, Columba suggested that he work as a missionary in Scotland to help convert as many people as had been killed in the battle and he exiled himself from Ireland.

In 563, he travelled to Scotland with twelve companions.



According to legend he first landed on the Kintyre Peninsula. However, being still in sight of his native land, he moved farther north up the west coast of Scotland. He landed on the island of Iona. There he built the monastery which was to become world famous and he spread the gospel to the Picts. For thirty years, he evangelized, studied, wrote, and governed his monastery at Iona.

Here is one legend about St Columba.



Once, when Saint Columba was traveling through the country of the Picts, he had to cross the River Ness. When he reached the shore there was a group of people, burying an unfortunate man who had been bitten by a water-monster. Columba ordered one of his people to swim across the river and get the boat on the other side so that he might cross.



As the man swam across the river the monster saw him coming and charged to the surface to devour him. Everyone who was watching was horrified and hid their eyes in terror. Everyone except Columba who raised his holy hand and inscribed the Cross in the empty air. Calling upon the name of God, he commanded the savage beast, saying: "Go no further! Do not touch the man! Go back at once!" At the voice of the saint, the monster was terrified, and fled. This story is the first recorded time the Loch Ness monster is ever mentioned.

Another legend tells of St Columba saving people from pirate raiders.



Whilst the Abbott at the Monastery on Iona, St Columba would visit various friends and acquaintances on the mainland. One of these people was Colman who lived near the Isle of Mull.

One day pirates came ashore and attacked Colman's house, breaking in to snatch whatever they could find. Colman and his family survived the assault, but their ordeal was far from over. In a replay of the first attack, the pirates returned and did the same thing all over again. Having been successful, they returned for a third raid. This time, however, Columba was near with some monks from Iona. He confronted them on the seashore, urging them to give up their plunder and abandon their violent ways. His pleading however fell on deaf ears and they sailed away.

Columba waded out into the water and lifted his hands in prayer. There he stayed until the pirate ship disappeared over the horizon. He rejoined his monks, who had watched the entire incident, and together they went up to a higher point above the shore. Columba told his companions that the Pirates wickedness would not go unpunished, for God was about to deal out a suitable retribution. Sure enough, even as the monks gazed out to sea, a terrible storm arose in the distance. Sweeping southward, it caught the pirates as they sailed between the islands of Mull and Coll, capsizing their vessel and drowning all who were aboard.



Columba died peacefully in 597, while working on a copy of the Psalter. He had put down his pen, rested a few hours, and was found dead before the Altar, a smile on his face.

For many years after his passing, Columba's influence was felt in the Celtic lands and abroad. Columba's mission at Iona led to the conversion of Scotland and of the north of England. He was a man of great faith who wanted to share the message of the Gospel with as many people as he possibly could. St Columba is a great model of how to love God and to help other people come to know Jesus. We are proud of St Columba and are glad he is our Patron Saint.

PRAYER OF SAINT COLUMBA

Be a bright flame before me, O God

A guiding star above me.

Be a smooth path below me,

A kindly shepherd behind me

Today, tonight, and forever.

Amen

