

Prayers and Poems from the Celtic Spiritual Tradition for Lent



For sixty years the folklorist Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912) traversed Scotland's Outer Hebrides isles collecting and translating the traditions of its Gaelic-Catholic people. His eventual trove contained a little of everything — their ballads, prayers, proverbs, hymns, charms, incantations, runes, poems, tales and songs. Carmichael's labor of love was published in six volumes across seventy years as *Carmina Gadelica* ("Hymns of the Gael") These prayers show a spirituality that are about the grateful hallowing of everyday life from rising to going to sleep ..

I. ORIGINAL CELTIC PRAYERS AND BLESSINGS

The Gospel of the God of Life

The Gospel of the God of life
To shelter thee, to aid thee;
Yea, the Gospel of beloved Christ
The holy Gospel of the Lord;
To keep thee from all malice,
From every dole and dolor;
To keep thee from all spite,
From evil eye and anguish.
Thou shalt travel thither, thou shalt
travel hither,

Morning Prayer

Thanks to Thee ever, O gentle Christ,
That Thou hast raised me freely from
the black

Thou shalt travel hill and headland,
Thou shalt travel down, thou shalt travel
up,
Thou shalt travel ocean and narrow.
Christ Himself is shepherd over thee,
Enfolding thee on every side;
He will not forsake thee hand or foot,
Nor let evil come anigh thee.

Originally from the *Carmina Gadelica III*, 191
Taken from Esther de Waal, editor, *The Celtic
Vision* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1988,
2001

And from the darkness of last night
To the kindly light of this day.

Praise unto Thee, O God of all creatures,
According to each life Thou hast poured

on me,
My desire, my word, my sense, my
repute,
My thought, my deed, my way, my
fame.

Prayer at Dressing

Bless to me, O God,
My soul and my body;
Bless to me, O God,
My belief and my condition;
Bless to me, O God,
My heart and my speech,
And bless to me, O God,
The handling of my hand;
Strength and busyness of morning,
Habit and temper of modesty,
Force and wisdom of thought,
And Thine own path, O God of virtues,
Till I go to sleep this night;
Thine own path, O God of virtues,
Till I go to sleep this night.

Sleeping Prayer

I am placing my soul and my body
On Thy sanctuary this night, O God,
On Thy sanctuary, O Jesus Christ,
On Thy sanctuary, O Spirit of perfect

truth,
The Three who would defend my cause,
Nor turn their backs upon me.
Thou, Father, who art kind and just,
Thou, Son, who didst overcome death,
Thou, Holy Spirit of power,
Be keeping me this night from harm;
The Three who would justify me
Keeping me this night and always

Thanksgiving

Thanks to Thee, O God, that I have risen
today,
To the rising of this life itself;
May it be to Thine own glory, O God of
every gift,
And to the glory of my soul likewise.
O great God, aid Thou my soul
With the aiding of Thine own mercy;
Even as I clothe my body with wool,
Cover Thou my soul with the shadow of
Thy wing.
Help me to avoid every sin,
And the source of every sin to forsake;
And as the mist scatters on the crest of
the hills,
May each ill haze clear from my soul, O
God.



II. Prayers and Poems by contemporary authors in the Celtic Tradition.

John O' Donohue (1956 – 2008)
Irish poet, priest, author, philosopher
and environmental activist is best
known for his popularization of Celtic
Spirituality.

*Human presence is a creative and
turbulent sacrament, a visible sign of*

invisible grace. Nowhere else is there such an intimate and frightening access to the mysterium. Friendship is the sweet grace that liberates us to approach, recognize and inhabit this adventure. .. Friendship is a creative and subversive force. It claims that intimacy is the secret law of life and universe. .. The Celtic mind was neither discursive nor systematic. Yet in their lyrical speculation the Celts brought the sublime unity of life and experience to expression. The Celtic mind was not burdened by dualism. It did not separate what belongs together.

John O'Donohue (1956-2008) from **Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom**



A Morning Offering

*I bless the night that nourished my heart
To set the ghosts of longing free
Into the flow and figure of dream
That went to harvest from the dark
Bread for the hunger no one sees.*

*All that is eternal in me
Welcome the wonder of this day,
The field of brightness it creates
Offering time for each thing
To arise and illuminate.*

*I place on the altar of dawn:
The quiet loyalty of breath,
The tent of thought where I shelter,
Wave of desire I am shore to
And all beauty drawn to the eye.*

*May my mind come alive today
To the invisible geography
That invites me to new frontiers,
To break the dead shell of yesterdays,
To risk being disturbed and changed.*

*May I have the courage today
To live the life that I would love,
To postpone my dream no longer
But do at last what I came here for
And waste my heart on fear no more.*

~

To Bless the Space Between Us , 2007

For Solitude

May you recognize in your life the presence power and light of your soul.

May you realize that you are never alone,

that your soul in its brightness and belonging connects you intimately with the rhythm of the universe.

May you have respect for your individuality and difference.

May you realize that shape of your soul is unique,

that you have a special destiny here,

that behind the façade of your life

there is something beautiful and eternal happening.

May you learn to see your self

with the same delight,

pride and expectation

with which God sees you in every moment.

J. Philip Newell (b. 1953) Priest of the Church of Scotland and former Warden of Iona is a poet, peacemaker, minister and scholar, internationally acclaimed for his work in the field of Celtic spirituality

Morning Prayer 1

*I watch this morning
for the light that the darkness has not overcome.*

I watch for the fire that was in the beginning, and that burns still in the brilliance of the rising sun.

I watch for the glow of life that gleams in the growing earth and glistens in sea and sky.

*I watch for your light, O God,
in the eyes of every living creature
and in the ever-living flame of my own soul.*

If the grace of seeing were mine this day I would glimpse you in all that lives,

*Grant me the grace of seeing this day,
Grant me the grace of seeing.*

Morning Prayer 2

*For the morning light
and its irresistible dawning,
for your untameable utterances of life
in boundless stretches of space
and the strength of the waves of the sea
I give you thanks, O God.*

*Release in me the power of your Spirit
that my soul may be free
and my spirit strong.*

*Release in me the freedom of your Spirit
that I may be bridled by nothing but love*

that I may be bridled only by love.

Morning Prayer 3

*In the morning light, O God,
may I glimpse again your image deep
within me
the threads of eternal glory
woven into the fabric of every man and woman.*

*Again may I catch sight of the mystery
of the human soul
fashioned in your likeness
deeper than knowing
more enduring than time.*

*And in glimpsing these threads of light
amidst the weakness and distortions of
my life*

*let me be recalled to the strength and
beauty deep in my soul.*

*Let me be recalled to the strength and
beauty of your image in every human
soul.*

Prayer 1

*Glory be to you, O God
for the gift of life
unfolding through those who have gone
before me.*

*Glory be to you, O God,
for your life planted within my soul
and in every soul coming into this
world,.*

*Glory be to you, O God,
for the grace of new beginnings
placed before me in every moment and*

encounter of life.

Glory , glory for the grace of new beginnings in every moment of life.

Prayer 2

*The vitality of God be mine this day
the vitality of the God of life.*

*The passion of Christ be mine this day,
the passion of the Christ of love.*

*The wakefulness of the Spirit be mine
this day,
the wakefulness of the Spirit of Justice.*

*The vitality, and passion and
wakefulness of God be mine
that I may be fully alive this day
the vitality and passion and
wakefulness of God*

That I may be fully alive.

Prayer 3

*For the might of the wind on the waters
for the swelling of the open sea
and the rushing of crested waves
thanks be to you , O God.*

*For the strength of desire in my body
for the sap of life that flows
and the yearning for birth and
abundance
thanks be to you.*

*Restore me in the image of your love
this day
that the longings of my heart may be
true.*

*Restore me in the image of your love
this day
that my passions for life may be full.*

CELTIC SPIRITUALITY

There are two major features of the Celtic tradition that distinguish it from what in contrast can be called the "Mediterranean tradition".

(1) Celtic spirituality is marked by the belief that what is deepest in us is the image of God. Sin has distorted and obscured that image but not erased it. The Mediterranean tradition, on the other hand, in its doctrine of original sin has taught that what is deepest in us is our sinfulness. This had given rise to a tendency to define ourselves in terms of the ugliness of our failures instead of the beauty of our origins

(2) The second major characteristic of the Celtic tradition is a belief in the essential goodness of creation. Not only is creation viewed as a blessing, it is regarded in essence as an expression of God. Thus the great Celtic teachers like the Irish teacher/ theologian Johannus Scotus Eriugena [815-877] refer to it as the "book of creation" in which we may read the mysteries of God . The Mediterranean tradition, on the other hand, has tended towards a separation of spirit and matter, and has distanced the mystery of God from the matter of creation.

From the introduction to ***Celtic Benediction: Morning and Night Prayer*** J. Philip Newell - St . Giles Cathedral Edinburgh (Erdmans Press, 2000)

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