



## Carmelite Spiritual Center

8433 Bailey Road \* Darien, Illinois 60561 \* 630-969-4141

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### LIFE IS WORTH GIVING

#### ST. PATRICK'S DAY AND CELTIC SPIRITUALITY

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

St. Patrick's Day usually brings with itself a veritable bevy of blarney, beverage and blandishments for those who observe it a simply another holiday. But for those who take their ancestral heritage more seriously, it is a time to reflect on the great ~~gifts~~ gifts, both spiritual and material, which are part of St. Patrick's legacy to his people scattered around the globe in the Celtic Diaspora.

The spirituality of the Celts, an important part of that legacy, has struck a more than resounding chord with current Christians of many denominations. Many people recognize that the Celts had a holistic belief system that was deeply personal, and at the same time, richly relational, communal, and creational. It is a spirituality that appeals to the deeper parts of our soul, and awakens the great yearning for a closer relationship with God and others.

Yet, what is so different about Celtic Spirituality that makes it such a unique experience that is so appealing? It appeals to the mind, body, and spirit. It is both joyous and mystical, and affirms the goodness of creation and the gifts of all people. And it blossoms in poetry, myth, and song.

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The Celts (Irish, Scots, Cornish, Welsh, Manx, and Bretons) were different, first of all, because they were an intensely verbal people in an oral culture. Poetry, music and stories were the basic themes of their earthly existence and became part of their religious expression. Thus monks, priests, musicians, poets, teachers and storytellers were their central figures.

Secondly, part of their verbal nature was their imaginative way of seeing, hearing, touching and feeling reality. To the Celts, the past and present were intertwined. Those who died are still present, and the "other" world is also transparent in everyday life. Such a mystical view of reality led them easily to accept Christianity when St. Patrick brought the Faith to Ireland in 432 A.D.

A third characteristic is that the Celts had the clan or tribe as a social unit, and this contributed to a strong communal sense of Church. They also had a great respect for heroes and warriors which was easily transferred to Christ and the saints.

Another characteristic is their great love of creation and all nature, especially in their homelands. And finally, the Celts love to wander the earth, especially to bring the message of Christ to others. Voyage, pilgrimage and search are still part of the Celtic way of life even today.

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This unique form of spirituality lasted, at least in the West of Ireland and other remote areas, until the Great Famine of 1845-50. It largely died with those in mass graves, and with others who brought it to lands where it was not easily accepted. Today, however, the spirituality of the Celts is enjoying a great revival of this sacred tradition with its vision of hope for today and always, not only for seniors but for all those who seek meaning in their lives.