

## SAINTS IN GLORY (PART 3)

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### 11<sup>th</sup> October Canice (Cainnach) *Sixth century*

Although associated with Kilkenny, Canice came originally from Derry. He was a companion of Columba, that other great Derry saint, and is mentioned in Adomnan's *Life of Columba*. He was an avid founder of monasteries, including not only the one that bears his name in Ossory – Kilkenny (Cill Chainnigh) but also at Aghaboe and Finglas and in Scotland and the Hebrides, where he was known as Kenneth. Inch Kenneth, a small island to the north of Iona was the site of one of his settlements. He was born in 516 and studied at Clonard under Finnian and later in Wales. The story is told of his miraculous crossing of the sea from Mull to Iona during a storm on his way to visit Columba. Columba asked his astounded fellow monks at Iona to prepare a feast, saying that God would bring peace in the storm for a great visitor (Canice) who duly arrived in safety. The situation was reversed some years later when Columba and some of his monks were themselves caught in a storm at sea, and Canice reputedly heard the voice of his friend calling for his prayers. Leaving his meal that he was eating he went into the church to pray for him. Canice was skilled in calligraphy, which he himself is said to have preferred to the more menial task of farming, though on one occasion he dropped his pen, accidentally marring his work, when the bell called the monks to work in the fields. Despite his preference for copying he declared he had hurried to the fields as an act of obedience.

### 12<sup>th</sup> October Mobhf (Mobhi) *Sixth century*

Nothing much appears to be known of this saint. He studied under Finnian at the famous monastic school of Clonard. He was a teacher of Columba and founded a monastery at Glasnevin in Dublin.

### 16<sup>th</sup> October Gall (Gall) *Sixth century*

Gall was originally from Leinster, but came north to Bangor to study there in its famous monastery under St Comgall. In 589 he set out with St Columbanus and his companions as missionaries in Europe. Gall travelled with them as far as what is now Switzerland, where he elected to remain, converting the local people and encouraging the destruction of their pagan idols – not it seems without opposition! The Benedictine abbey of St Gallen was later built and developed on the site of a hermitage that he established. St Gallen became renowned for its library, with its important collection of Irish manuscripts. Gall is one of the patron saints of Switzerland.

### **27<sup>th</sup> October Otteran (Odhran) Sixth century**

Otteran was one of the company which sailed with Columba to Iona. Sadly he died shortly after he arrived there. His burial place, known as *Relig Odhrain*, clearly became highly venerated, as it became the burial place of kings from not only Scotland and Dal Riada, but also from Norway. Lovers of Shakespeare will remember the lines from *Macbeth*, referring to the murdered Duncan's body being: "Carried to Colme-kill The sacred storehouse of his predecessors, And guardian of their bones."

George Simms points out that "Scandinavian links with Iona explain the special place Otteran has as the patron of the see of Waterford which was founded by the Danes".

### **3<sup>rd</sup> November Malachy (Maolmhaodhog) Twelfth century**

With Malachy, we enter the age of the twelfth century reform movement, in which he played a significant part, and which resulted in the Irish Church becoming integrated into the diocesan system of the western church. Malachy was born in 1084, and as a youth went to study at Armagh under its abbot Imar Ua hAedacain and was subsequently ordained priest. He was appointed episcopal vicar in 1120-21 during the bishop's absence. In 1123 he went to Bangor (Co Down) to reform its famous monastery and in 1124 became Bishop of Connor. In 1129 Malachy was nominated by Cellach, Bishop of Armagh to be his successor, but was unable to take possession of the see until 1134, due to the strength of the hereditary faction who felt that the bishops of Armagh should remain in the Clann Sinaich. Having successfully gained the see, and broken the hereditary principle, Malachy humbly resigned the see in favour of Gilla mac Liag, a like minded reformer, and returned to the see of Down. In 1139-40 Malachy journeyed to Rome in an unsuccessful attempt to gain Papal approval for reforms in the Irish Church, stopping on his way at Clairvaux and establishing a lasting friendship with St Bernard. He was so impressed by the Cistercian form of monasticism that he established the first Cistercian monastery in Ireland at Mellifont in 1142. In 1148 he made a second journey to Rome with a request from the Irish Church as a whole for approval of its reforms. Sadly he failed to reach Rome, falling ill and dying at Clairvaux – in the arms, it is said, of St Bernard. He was buried at the High Altar of the abbey church. He died on All Souls' Day, 2nd November, but his feast day has always been kept the following day.

### **14<sup>th</sup> November Laurence O'Toole (Labhras or Lorcan Ua Tuathail) Twelfth century**

Laurence was deeply involved in church and state politics of his day. He was also well connected; his father was chieftain of the small kingdom of Ui Muiredaig (modern south Kildare), his mother came from the O'Byrnes of Wicklow, his half sister married Diarmait Mac Murchadha and his niece was Aoife, also a daughter of Diarmait, married Richard, Earl of Pembroke (Strongbow). In his early teens Laurence was taken into the household of Diarmait, as a hostage of his father, where for a while he was kept virtually a prisoner, until the abbot of Glendalough took him into his monastery. He eventually became abbot himself. He declined to become bishop of Glendalough, but was persuaded in 1161 to accept the see of Dublin on the death of Gregory its

archbishop. This was significant, as Laurence was the first person from "Gaelic Ireland" to be appointed to what was originally a Viking see with close connections with Canterbury, and he brought it fully into the Irish Church. He instituted reforms in his diocese, gaining Papal approval for the cathedral chapter to adopt the rule of the Arrouasian Augustinians. He also assisted in the foundation of the Augustinian Priory of All Hallows, outside the city, which was later to become the site of Queen Elizabeth I's Trinity College. In 1179 he attended the Third Lateran Council summoned by Pope Alexander III, and was appointed Papal Legate for Ireland by the same Pope. On the secular side, Laurence was present at the convention at Athboy, which recognised Tory O'Connor as High King of Ireland. He attempted, unsuccessfully, to negotiate with Strongbow when he attacked Dublin in 1170, but felt it his duty to accept the authority of Henry II when he came to Ireland the following year. He represented Rory O'Connor in the negotiations with Henry that led to the Treaty of Windsor, which recognised the High King's authority in areas not controlled by the Normans. Laurence died at Eu in Normandy while returning from yet another diplomatic mission to Henry.

### **23<sup>rd</sup> November Columbanus (Columbanus) *Seventh century***

Born in Leinster in 543, Columbanus came north in about 560, becoming a novice at the monastery of Cleenish on Lough Erne, moving from there to the austere monastery at Bangor under Comgall. Some years later, Columbanus left Bangor with twelve companions – seemingly patterned on Christ and the Twelve Apostles – to become a *perigrinus*, a permanent exile for Christ's sake from his own country. This was a pattern followed by other Irish missionary saints, though modern historians tend to doubt the authenticity of this pattern. Columbanus and his companions first settled in the Voges area of France, and established a settlement in a ruined Roman fort at Annegray, converting the ruined Temple of Diana into their church. Despite his popularity, he moved on to another disused fort at Luxeuil, and to another at Fontaine. However, criticism of the morals of the King of Burgundy led to the expulsion of the monks, and they were forced to move on, eventually reaching what is now Switzerland, where they left Gall. The party crossed the Alps and eventually reached Lombardy where the king gave them a ruined church about seventy miles south of Milan, which was to become the famous monastery at Bobbio. Columbanus was called back to Luxeuil in 615. However, he declined and died at Bobbio in the same year. The monastery at Bobbio amassed a great collection of tenth century manuscripts including the *Bobbio Missal*, an important collection of Galilean liturgical texts showing Irish interests.

### **24<sup>th</sup> November Colman (Colman) *Sixth century***

George Simms has estimated that there are "some hundreds of saints called Colman". Amongst the most important are the Sts Coleman venerated at Inishbofin and Lindisfarne, Lismore, Kilmacduagh, Dromore, Cloyne and Limerick and as far afield as Melk in Austria. The saint commemorated on 24th November is Colman of Cloyne. Simms also says that Colman was ordained at the age of fifty, which would fit well with the story of his conversion. Colman was a – non-Christian – bard and teacher in Cashel. St Brendan is reputed to have visited the area shortly after the discovery of the remains of St Ailbe there, and he considered it unfitting that they should remain in the possession of a pagan, whereupon Colman asked Brendan to baptise him so that he

could properly have custody of them!

**12<sup>th</sup> December Finnian of Clonard (Fionnan Chluain Aird) *Sixth century***

Finnian of Clonard, not to be confused with Finnian of Movilla, came from a noble family from the area of County Carlow. He was educated at Wexford, and then moved to Wales and studied under St Caiman and St David, before returning to Ireland and founding his famous monastery at Clonard in Co Meath. He became a bishop in 580. He was reputed to have had a fantastic memory, being able to memorise anything after only a single reading. Finnian's monastic school at Clonard became famous throughout Ireland – 3000 are reputed to have attended at a single time, which led to his being called "The Teacher of the Saints". Like many of the early Irish saints, Finnian led an extremely austere life, living on a vegan diet of vegetables and herbs. It is interesting to note that abstinence from meat and fats is still the Lenten diet of a devout Orthodox Christian.

**18<sup>th</sup> December Flannan (Flannan Mac Tairdelbaig) *Seventh century***

Flannan was the son of a chieftain of Thomond, but forsook the luxuries of his home to become a disciple of St Molua – rather against his father's wishes. Like many of the early Irish saints he became a *perigrinus*, undertaking long and arduous missionary journeys. There is a tradition that he journeyed to Rome and was there consecrated bishop by Pope John IV. Certainly he appears to have gone as a missionary to Scotland; a small group of islands off the coast of Lewis is named after him. He eventually succeeded Molua as bishop at Killaloe.