

PRAYING WITH THE CELTIC SAINTS



ST HILDA OF WHITBY

We light this candle because Christ is the Light no darkness can extinguish



*In the name of the Father who fosters.
In the name of the Son who frees.
In the name of the Spirit who freshens.
In the name of the Sacred Three.*

*We welcome you, Lord:
into our home, into our heart.
Open us now to your Truth.
Fill us with your wisdom, love and peace.
Amen.*

WISDOM

Wisdom lights up the land:
She calls us to walk in her ways.
Wisdom has built a house:
She calls us to learn her ways.
Wisdom is more precious than rubies:
We desire her above all things.

SCRIPTURE

Proverbs 8 : 10-14

Choose my instruction instead of silver,
knowledge rather than choice gold,
for wisdom is more precious than rubies
and nothing you desire can compare with her.
'I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence;
I possess knowledge and discretion.
To fear the LORD is to hate evil;
I hate pride and arrogance,
evil behaviour and perverse speech.
Counsel and sound judgment are mine;
I have insight, I have power.'

2 Corinthians 5 : 18-19

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Matthew 5: 9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

THE LIFE OF ST HILDA



Hilda was a princess, born into pagan nobility. She was subsequently baptised into the Roman tradition and at 33, decided to follow her sister to France and become a nun.

However, Aidan, the Bishop of Northumbria, called her back to take over a monastic community in Hartlepool. Hilda and Aidan became soul friends. She learned much from his community at Lindisfarne and as a result, chose to live her faith in the Celtic tradition, establishing an abbey at Whitby.

St Hilda was renowned for her wisdom and her passion for reconciliation. This made her the perfect choice to host the Synod of Whitby in 664 AD, which was called to decide whether the ways of Roman or Celtic Christianity should be officially adopted and followed.

The Roman way was deeply patriarchal, everything being governed by Rome. Whilst affording unity, it also allowed certain figures to become rich and powerful. Only men were allowed to hold positions of authority and the date of Easter was governed by the teachings of St Peter.

Celtic culture embodied a deep sense of social justice. Men and women were considered equals : Boudicea was a Celtic queen – can you imagine a lady of Roman nobility leading her forces to war in a chariot?! Men and women shared in the ministry of the Church and in the governance of abbeys and monasteries. Small communities lived in and around a monastery governed by an Abbot or Abbess. The community at Whitby was famous for holding all goods in common – no-one owned anything and life was based on peace and charity. The date of Easter was governed by the teachings of St John.

Disputes between the Roman and Celtic Church were both trivial and more serious : they couldn't agree on how monks should shave their heads and nor could they agree on how the date of Easter should be calculated. When King Oswy, who followed the Celtic way, married Enfleda, who followed the Roman way, they discovered that they were celebrating Easter on different days. This meant that as one of them was fasting, the other was feasting! Hence, he called the Synod to settle the matter once and for all.



Fig. 1. Roman Tonsure.



Fig. 2. Celtic Tonsure (according to the view here contended for).

Hilda's wisdom was so great that not only ordinary folk, but kings and princes would come to seek her advice. She worked with Cuthbert (a successor to Aidan at Lindisfarne) to resolve the disputes between her former, Roman tradition and the Celtic way. The disappointment felt by Hilda and Cuthbert when, after much discussion, it was decided to adopt the way of Roman Christianity, must have been immense. The Celtic case was put by Bishop Colman (the then Bishop of Lindisfarne), who was so upset by the outcome, that he returned to Ireland with his monks.

Hilda, on the other hand, carried on working tirelessly for reconciliation between the two churches, continuing to teach *'the observance of all virtues, especially those of peace and charity.'* By doing this she helped herself and others to cross the barriers of disappointment, anger, bitterness and fear to live in love and peace with all.

Hilda was well known for her ability to discern the God-given gifts of individuals and to encourage them : Caedmon (who became St Caedmon) was a simple cowherd - an illiterate stammerer – but under her guidance, he became a monk and the author of great worship music, songs and poetry. She inspired both the learned and the uneducated to achieve great things for God. She was ill for the last 6 years of her life (possibly with TB) but nonetheless, continued to inspire and direct the spiritual community of Whitby until her death in 680 AD.

REFLECTION

God sends each person into this world:

with a special message to deliver, with a special song to sing to others, with a special act of love to bestow.

No one else can speak my message, or sing my song, or offer my act of love.

These are entrusted only to me.

St Hilda was gifted with wisdom, patience, endurance, love and forgiveness, which enabled her passionate pursuit of reconciliation and peace.

Let's spend some time reflecting on the gifts with which God has blessed us and how we, like St Hilda, might use them to bless others.....

Lord you have given me so much, I ask for one more thing – a grateful heart.

OUR PRAYERS FOR THE WORLD



In the stillness, we are here with you Lord, to lift before you our world in need : those situations and people we know and those we only know of. In your infinite wisdom, all are known to you.

Thanking you for all our blessings, we pray for all who are suffering as a result of the pandemic : those who are ill at home and those in hospital and in Intensive Care Units. We pray for everyone whose treatment for other ailments has been delayed and for those who are afraid to go to hospital at this time....

We remember everyone living in a care home. We pray for their safety and your comfort for them in these distressing times.

Bless with strength and courage all those who risk their lives to care for the sick and the vulnerable. We thank you for them and pray your protection of them.

We pray wisdom for those seeking a vaccine.

We remember all those who are lonely and now ever more isolated and we pray the comfort of your presence in the loving kindness of others.

We bring before you all those who are in need of healing, whether in body, mind or spirit. We remember especially

We remember those who have died and pray your eternal rest and peace for them. We ask the comfort of your promises for those who mourn. Draw close to them, that they might have a real sense of your presence.

Lord, make us a channel of your blessing that we, like St Hilda, might play our part in bringing your peace to the world and your healing to those in need.

We ask this in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CLOSING PRAYER

Spirit of the risen Christ, as the lamps prepare to light up the evening,
kindle in us the fire of your love.

Holy Three, draw near to us with your encircling light,
kindle in us the fire of your peace.

Send us, O Lord, the light of your Truth,
kindle in us the fire of your wisdom :
you bring salvation and healing.

Now, as we await the lights of the evening,
we raise our voices in praise :

Worthy are you of endless blessing, Sun of our night, lamp of our days.
Amen.

'Keep the peace of the Gospel with one another and indeed with all the world'

(The last words of St Hilda to her sisters at Whitby)

BLESSING

(based on the teaching of St Hilda)

Trade with the gifts God has given you.

Bend your minds to holy learning, that you may escape the fretting moth of
littleness of mind that would wear out your souls.

Brace your wills to action, that they may not be the spoils of weak desires.

Train your hearts and lips to song, which gives courage to the soul.

Be buffeted by trials; learn to laugh.

Be reproved: give thanks.

Having failed, determine to succeed.

And until we meet again, may God keep us in the palm of his hand.

Amen.

