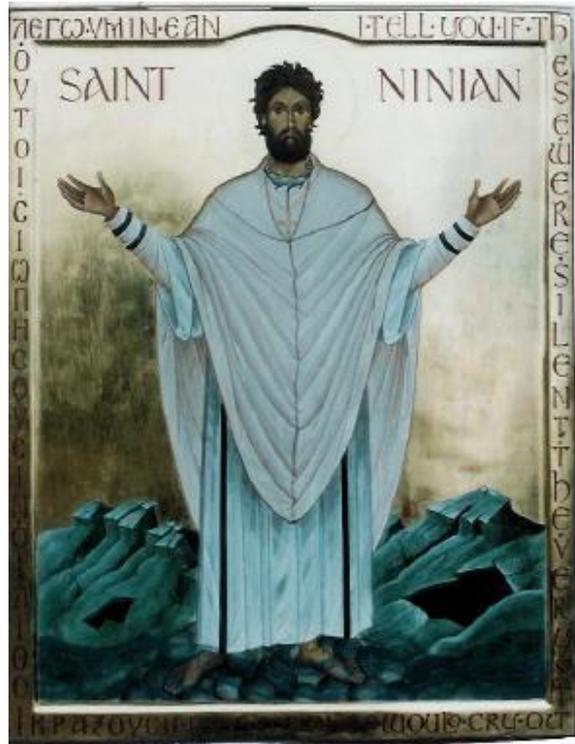


# PRAYING WITH THE CELTIC SAINTS



## ST NINIAN of WHITHORN

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



The light of Christ has come into the world!

**We give you thanks that you led our forebears in the Faith  
through a cloud by day and through fire by night.**

We give you thanks, Kindly Light, that the torch of faith  
was brought to this land by Celtic saints such as St Ninian.

**We give you thanks that you ever lead your people on.**

Light up our dark hearts by the light of your Christ:  
may his Word illumine our way.

**For you pour forth loving kindness, Source and Saviour and Radiant Spirit.  
Amen.**

## A CATECHISM ATTRIBUTED TO ST NINIAN

What is the best in this world?

**To do the will of our Maker.**

What is his will?

**That we should live according to the laws of his creation.**

How do we know those laws?

**By study – by studying the Scriptures with devotion.**

What tool has our Maker provided for this study?

**The intellect, which can probe everything.**

And what is the fruit of this study?

**To perceive the eternal Word of God reflected in every plant and insect, every bird and animal and every man and woman.**



### SCRIPTURE

#### *Mark 9 : 2-10*

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what “rising from the dead” meant.



### *2 Peter 1 : 16-19*

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

### *THE LIFE OF SAINT NINIAN*

Ninian was born in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century on the Solway Firth, the border between England and Scotland. His father was a Cumbrian, Celtic chieftain, mainly engaged in fighting the Picts, Angles and Gaels (from Ireland) – all of whom were trying to gain control after the collapse of the Roman Empire. Ninian was a giant of a man (both physically and of the Church). His father wanted him to be a soldier, but Ninian was determined to be a soldier for Christ. When he was 18, he went to Rome for deeper instruction in the faith and was made a bishop. St Ninian is most certainly a Celtic saint for today : In these times of pandemic, the Church has had to find new ways to worship and serve Christ. Ninian, too, introduced a totally new expression of the Christian faith – the *first* community for the worship and service of Christ. In 397 he built the first stone church in Britain. This was known as the ‘Candida Casa’ (the White House). Candida is the word used in the Latin bible to describe the glistening white of Jesus’ garment at the time of his transfiguration.

Ninian's church was excavated in 1949 and the white mortar, which gave it its name, was still clearly visible. However, the name referred not only to the physical appearance of the church, but to the light of Christ that shone from it into the darkness of the pagan world all around.

Ninian also had a hermitage in a narrow cave on a pebble beach on the shore of Solway Firth. This cave has been (and remains) a place of pilgrimage down the centuries.

Nearby Whithorn flourished as a base from which missions went out to the Picts. The Picts were a fearsome, wode-wearing tribe, many of whom abandoned their pagan idolatry after hearing Bishop Ninian preach. In all likelihood, he would have used the catechism we said together earlier.



From his church to his deeds, *light* has always been associated with St Ninian : King Tuduvallus was a follower of the pagan druids, who opposed Ninian. He became blind and in his despair, asked Ninian to pray for him. Ninian made the sign of the cross on his eyelids and the King repented and accepted Christ. His sight was restored. Like Jesus, Ninian understood the relationship between the state of the soul and the state of the body. Spiritual and physical sight were treated together. As Jesus healed the blind man and then immediately went on to describe himself as the Light of the World, so Ninian was being true to that holistic approach.

Ninian was a great beacon of spiritual power. He is the first, recorded person to use a caim prayer (circle prayer) – often used in Celtic worship today. It is said that one night, a farmer asked him to protect his cattle from rustlers. Despite the farmer's protestations, he led the cattle into the middle of the field, stood them together and began to walk sun-wise around them, dragging his staff along the ground to create a circle in the earth. As he walked, he prayed a caim (meaning 'protection') prayer. They then slept in the farmer's hut. The rustlers couldn't believe their 'luck' on seeing the exposed cattle. As they crossed the circle, they collapsed in agony. The leader tore his side on a cow's horn and when his intestines spilled out, Ninian put them back and healed him! The men were terrified and amazed. They listened to Ninian speak of the power of Christ and went away converted to the faith. Ninian not only believed in, but practised the power of prayer to protect, heal, pardon and release. He encouraged his disciples to experience the kingdom of God fully lived in everyday life. He was a man who knew the reality of God and the reality of spiritual power. The flame of Christianity was kept bright by Ninian. He shone in the so-called Dark Ages – following Jesus' command : 'Let your light so shine before people that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.'

## REFLECTION

It might be said that we, like Ninian, live in dark times, amidst the fear, hardship, sickness and loneliness that are all part of the chaos caused by this pandemic. Let's spend a little time thinking about Jesus' promise to be with us always (Matthew 28 : 20) and how we have perceived his Light in the darkness that now envelops the world : St Ninian was a man who believed deeply in the power of prayer. Perhaps these circumstances have led us into a new relationship with God, as we are able to devote more time to reading the Scriptures and praying – nurturing a deeper relationship with God and finding in that a treasure trove of strength and comfort. Perhaps we will always remember the Light of his love revealed in the selflessness and compassion shared among strangers – or perhaps it is in the strengthening of our relationship with one another, as we truly learn to live Jesus' command to 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34). The Light is always with us : we see it more easily in the dark.

### WE PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS

In Ninian, there was nothing of fear, all was love :  
Forgive us for the places in our lives where fear has driven out love.

Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

In Ninian, truth, holiness and warmth shone forth :  
Forgive us for the places in our lives that are false or frozen.

Christ have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

Lord, Ninian was the guileless one: take from us all guile.

Ninian was the tireless one: take from us all sloth.

Ninian was the fearless one: take from us all cowardice.

Ninian was the radiant one: take from us all that clouds the soul.

Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**



### WE GIVE THANKS

Thank you Lord for the faith that led St Ninian to witness to you in a land ignorant of your ways.

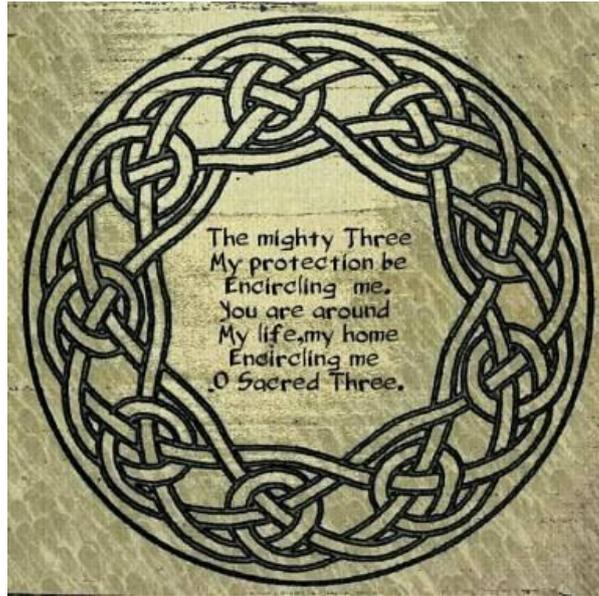
Thank you for his vision of a Christian community to be a light in a dark place.

Thank you for his courage to pray for miracles  
and that a Shining House of the Lord was established on our soil.

Give us such faith, vision and courage  
to establish the light of the Gospel,  
that it may shine hope in dark times and dark places.

In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

## A CAIM PRAYER FOR THE WORLD



Circle, O God, all those who risk their lives to heal the sick and to care for the vulnerable :

Keep health within, keep sickness out.

Circle, O God, all those who are feeling isolated and lonely. Be with our brothers and sisters in care homes. Help us to help them know that they are not forgotten:

Keep peace within, keep fear out.

Circle, O God, all who work to produce our food and those who deliver it.

Keep strength within, keep weakness out.

Circle, O God, scientists working on vaccines and cures for disease; policy makers, seeking a way forward.

Keep wisdom in, keep folly out.

Circle, O God, all those who suffer the effects of conflict, famine, disease and homelessness. We name before you the people and places we carry on our hearts:

Keep hope within, keep despair out.

Circle, O God, all those known to us who are in need of your healing today, as we name them before you now.....

We remember those who have died and those who mourn them.

May all in need know your love and presence.

Help them to see your Light in their darkness.

Keep light within, keep darkness out.

Lord, make us a channel of your blessing that we, like St Ninian, might play our part in bringing your light into 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

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,  
on earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day, our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil;  
for Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

## BLESSING

**May the countenance of the Father of glory,  
the countenance of the Sun of suns,  
the countenance of the radiant Spirit  
pour white light abundantly upon us and those we love  
hour by hour, this day and forevermore  
Amen.**

