

Radio Message to Ireland RTE Radio 3 from Dingle June 2010

I come as a pilgrim walking the saints ways of Dingle. I bring you greetings from Ireland's outpost in England, the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, where Saint Aidan went from boyhood beside the Shannon to manhood beside the Saxon. Aidan was a bishop, but he refused to put on airs or abuse the trust the people placed in him. If he was given money by fat cats who wanted to buy influence, he gave it to the poor and carried on as before. When he was given a royal horse to speed up his mission, he gave it to a beggar and continued to walk everywhere. Aidan was a great walker. He was one of those many Irish pilgrims for the love of God who for ever left their beloved homeland and its comforts to lay down their lives to make another people great – in Aidan's case that the unruly, barbaric English might learn the gentle ways of Christ.

That was a long time ago, yet Aidan's example, almost forgotten by his own people, has inspired a modern movement of spiritual seekers across the world. What an extra-ordinary thing that this should happen at the very time when people, disappointed by failings in organised religion, had put their trust in the Celtic Tiger, when during the boom years we fell in love with the things money could buy. It could not last. Deep down we knew that we could not take those things with us when we die. So is it so extra-ordinary that people are asking 'Where do we head for now - we don't want to go back into a closed box, nor fall off a ladder of plastic gold?'

This modern movement, of which my own Community of Aidan and Hilda is a part, recalls that Columbanus thought of people as guests of the world. We try to make this global village our home, and earth our friend, and let our feet follow our heart until we find places of resurrection. Columbanus also advised that as we walk the world we hold a book in each hand: in one, the book of Scripture, in the other, the Book of Nature. If we comb through the Bible we find pearls which are like love letters from God. Why don't we store these love letters in our hearts so that they inspire our every step? If we become still and truly present to nature, star and stone beckon to us, and we learn to flow like water, soar like birds and run like deer. We become Athletes of the Spirit. Dingle hosts sporting races of running, cycling, swimming and kayaking. We encourage people also to be Athletes of the Spirit.

At Bangor monastery, where Columbanus trained, they taught that a person without a soul friend, an anamchara, is like a human being without a head. So we, along with ever growing numbers, invite a soul friend who is an Athlete of the Spirit to accompany us on our life journey - someone with whom we can be ourselves and to whom we can entrust our deepest thoughts.

Earlier in this service we had a reading about a prophet named Elijah who went into a desert place and listened to God. Elijah actually started a school of people who learned to listen to God. Listening is almost a lost art, so we are trying to develop groups who learn to listen to God. If you would like to be one of them, please contact me through our Community of Aidan and Hilda web site. The New Testament reading described how Jesus sorted out someone who felt a hundred voices were tearing him apart. I know that

feeling, too. The hubbub of sound-bites and adverts, invitations and advice, expectations within and without – how do we choose the right way? We pledge to create spaces of silence as well as work, play as well as duties so that we develop a good life rhythm, with time to discern the most authentic choice.

I have spoken to priests in the last few days. ‘We have got to learn to let go’ said one – then there’s no knowing what new thing God will do. When we modern people in The Community of Aidan and Hilda make our promises to let go of our own control and let the divine spirit within lead us, we have a little ceremony. We call it Making the Voyage of the Coracle. We read a piece from the Voyage of Saint Brendan, who set out in his coracle within sight of this church. I have witnessed young and old people make their Voyage of the Coracle in places as varied as the Australian outback and a Norwegian fjord. After they have pledged to leave behind all that holds them back from following the call, we say words like these to them, and we offer these words to you, also:

God is calling you to leave behind everything that stops you setting sail in the ocean of
God's love.

If you have heard the call of the Wild Goose, the untameable Spirit of God:

be ready for the Spirit to lead you into wild, windy or well-worn places in the knowledge

that God will help you restore

a weakened church to its mission

a fragmented world to its wholeness

and a spoiled creation to harmony with its Creator.

Ray Simpson 2010