

# The Way of St. Columban

## a nine step pilgrimage



Celebrating 1,400th anniversary  
of the death of St. Columban 615- 2015



## The Way of St. Columban

The Way of St. Columban is an ecumenical pilgrimage with nine steps along a selected route.

Each step consists of:

- a reading from Scripture
- the words of St. Columban
- a brief reflection,
- the Our Father.

The nine steps conclude with:

- the litany of St. Columban
- prayers of intercession,
- prayer of Saint Columban
- shared Blessing.

Pilgrims may also choose to share their reflections on local sites, songs, prayers and invocations that they consider appropriate throughout the route.

These nine steps are a synthesis of what concerns us as a Christian pilgrim people. They are an integral part of every pilgrimage, whether it be to historic sites or in one's own locality, community or parish.



- Step 1. We are on a pilgrim journey
- Step 2. We are disciples of Jesus
- Step 3. We are brothers and sisters on the road of life
- Step 4. The Word of God gives me life.
- Step 5. No one is excluded from the table of the Lord
- Step 6. We are called to mission
- Step 7. How awesome is this place!
- Step 8. This is a holy land
- Step 9. We are Pilgrims for Christ.



## **Gathering Prayer**

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

### **Prayer of St. Columban**

Lord, kindle our lamps, Saviour most dear to us, that we may always shine in your presence and always receive light from you, the Light Perpetual, so that our own personal darkness may be overcome, and the world's darkness driven from us. Amen.

(St. Columban, Sermon XII)

### **Welcome**

You are very welcome to our pilgrimage of the “Way of Saint Columban”. We are here to honour this great monk, missionary and saint. Today we are connecting with 1,400 years of history and pilgrimage as we go through these twelve steps along the route we have chosen.

Columban, known also as Columbanus and Colombán was born in Leinster, Ireland in 543, he became a monk in Bangor under the Abbot Comgall. Around the age of 45 he left his homeland with a group of companions to continue his missionary journey as a Pilgrim for Christ across continental Europe. He ended his earthly pilgrimage in Bobbio in Northern Italy in 615. A founder of monasteries and communities, healer, prophet, missionary, he has inspired peoples throughout the centuries to focus on their life's journey and embrace the call to follow Christ.

Doing this “Way of St. Columban” we look to Columbanus, the greatest of all Irish missionaries to help us give meaning to our own pilgrim journey as we go about our daily tasks.

More than half of Columban's life was spent at home and there he lived out what would have been considered “green martyrdom”. Such

martyrdom was seen as leaving behind the immediate excitements and pleasures of comfort-driven living. It is staying with and embracing the challenges of everyday life, something that each of us is called to.

In late middle-age he felt called to leave his monastery in Bangor and sailed with twelve companions into the unknown, never to return. He had a twofold reason for going: to forego the pleasures of home, to leave Ireland and never return, making this sacrifice out of love of God; and secondly to spread the Gospel.

He became a migrant in Europe and experienced everything that meant getting to know another culture that was not his own. He had to make inroads into the social and political structures of places like Luxeuil, Brengenz and Bobbio and negotiate his welcome. He had to become familiar with the practise of local Kings, the local church and bishops. Often he was not made welcome and he was seen as a stranger.

Columban's tremendous love and respect for nature was reflected in the beautiful places chosen for his monasteries. While the monks lived off the land, rivers and seas, they did not devastate the forests, nether did they deplete the rivers of fish. They befriended the wilderness and even made friends with the wild beasts and animals. They were the precursors of St. Francis and his love for nature, and calls us to a new respect for ecology in Ireland.

As Columban journeyed from place to place across Europe, he was dedicated to living and spreading the Gospel. He was wrapped up in the mystery of the God. His encounter with God was in the quite places and his church was the cave on the hillside outside villages and towns. We hope the steps of this walk will give us a sense of what Columban was about and an inspiration to continue the mission. This is a mission that is grounded in our own particular reality and in the soil that we trod. It is a mission that recognises the presence of God in our midst, who speaks to us in the telling of our story, who connects with us through those with whom we live and who touches us through people we meet along the road.

## Step 1. We are on a pilgrim journey

### i). **Biblical text:**        **Is.9: 1-2; 5-6.**

The Lord said to Joshua son of Nun: No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” So Joshua said to the people: “Remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you: ‘The Lord your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land.’ Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers until the Lord gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise.” Then they answered Joshua, “Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!”

### ii). **The word of St. Columban.**

From his fifth sermon: “Oh, life, fragile and mortal. ... so you are the road to life, not life itself; you are a real road, but not a level one, long for some, short for others, broad for some, narrow for others, joyful for some, sad for others.” (*Sermon 5.1*)

From his sixth sermon: “I am always on pilgrimage, moving from the

day of my birth up till the day of death, and throughout the individual days of my life I change, and what things change or how they change I do not see; and I can never see my whole life in one together, and what yesterday I was, today I am not, and thus what today I am, tomorrow I shall not be;" (*Sermon 6,1*)

### **iii). Reflection**

We are on a journey through life. Very often we share with family, friends and neighbours our stories, as we journey through light, shadow, memory, joy, suffering, forgiveness and hopeful longing. We are shaped and influenced by our personal, family and community history. We carry in our veins the historical memory of who we are.

As pilgrims, we are following in the footsteps of countrymen and countrywomen, saints, sinners, prophets, martyrs and missionaries, who have left their imprint on the landscape. As a pilgrim church we are part of a community that has been moulded by tradition and religious expression. Part of our pilgrim journey is to do penance for the evil that has come upon the Earth and upon our Church from generation to generation. Our pilgrim path brings us to acknowledge the scars of sin throughout the land, and opens us to forgiveness as we pray for both Church and people. But most of all, we are a people of the Resurrection and this Way of St. Columban is the Way of the Resurrection.

### **iv). Our Father ...**



## Step 2. We are disciples of Jesus

### i). The Word of God

From the Gospel of St. John: “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”  
(Jn.13: 13-15)

### ii). The words of St. Columban

From his letter to a young disciple: “Be helpful in humbleness and most lowly in authority. Be simple in faith, but well trained in manners; demanding in your own affairs, but unconcerned in those of others. Be guileless in friendship, astute in the face of deceit, though in time of ease, tender in hard times ... Be pleasant when things are unpleasant ... disagree when necessary, but be in agreement about truth ... Be a lover of the ordinary person, and do not wish for riches, but cool down excitement and speak your mind ... Though weary, do not give up. Weep and rejoice at the one time out of zeal and hope.”  
(*Sermon 6. Letter to a young disciple*)

### iii). Reflection

Pilgrimage is about sharing with one another along the road. As we walk along with one another we might like to share some of our own story.

### iv). Our Father ...



## **Step 3. We are brothers and sisters on the road together**

### **i). The word of God**

From the letter of St. Paul to the Collosians: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” (Col.3: 12-15)

### **ii). The words of St. Columban**

From his letter to the French Bishops: “We are all fellow members of one body, whether Franks or Britons or Irish or whatever our race. Thus let all our races rejoice in knowledge of the faith and in recognising the Son of God ... In Him let us love one another, praise one another, correct one another, encourage one another, pray for one another.”  
*(Letter 2, to the French bishops)*

### **iii). Reflection**

Since Columban first crossed the mountains, valleys and seas as a pilgrim for Christ, his followers have embraced many cultures, religions, languages and ways of life across Europe and the wider world. Columban through his life and work speaks to our multicultural world today. As we walk along, we might like to share how people from different cultures and backgrounds who may have touched our lives.

### **iv). Our Father ...**

## **Step 4. The Word of God gives me life.**

### **i). The Word of God**

Taken from the letter of St. Paul to the Collosians: “From the letter of St. Paul to the Collosians. “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.” (Col.3:16.)

### **ii). The words of St. Columban**

From his fourth letter: “May no one and nothing separate us from the love of Christ, no trial, no difficulty, no persecution, no hunger, no nakedness, no danger, no death by sword, fire cross or murder, nothing sad, nothing sweet, nothing hard, nothing fair, may none of the world’s vanities separate us from Christ.” (*Sermon 4,3*)

### **iii). Reflection**

As Christians, the bread of the Word of God and the bread from the Eucharistic table are what sustain us on our journey through life. The Living Word that has been handed down to us through our ancestors, grandparents, parents, teachers, and pastors is our daily bread. This Word is present to us now. As we pass the Word of God (Bible) from one to another you are invited to embrace the Word by taking the holy Bible in your hands and making a gesture, a bow, a kiss, a sign of the cross as a sign of Living Word present to us this day.

### **iv). Our Father ...**



## **Step 5. No one is excluded from the table of the Lord**

### **i). The Word of God**

The Gospel according to St. Matthew: “As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.’ Jesus replied, ‘they do not need to go away. You give them something to eat. ‘We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they answered. ‘Bring them here to me,’ he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children”. (Mt.14: 15-21)

### **ii). The words of St. Columban**

From the Rule for Monks: “The food of the monks should be frugal and confined to the evening hours, let it be such as to avoid gorging, and their drink such as to avoid drunkenness, so that it may sustain them but do them no harm: vegetables, beans, flour mixed with water, along with a small loaf of bread, lest the stomach be strained and mind stifled.”  
*(Rule for Monks)*

From his seventh sermon: “Let us eat with the poor, drink with the poor, share with the poor, that even we may deserve to share with the poor in that place where they shall be satisfied who here for Christ’s sake hunger and thirst after righteousness.” *(Sermon 7)*

### **iii). Reflection**

Let us take a moment to bless the bread that we brought for the journey and share it with one another. We say together: Blessed are you Lord

God of all creation, through you goodness you have given us this bread to share, let us give thanks for those who prepared it and bring us closer to you and one another through the bread we share, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

**iv). Our Father ...**



## **Step 6. We are called to mission**

### **i). The Word of God**

From the Gospel according to St. Luke: “When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them: ‘Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.’ So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.” (Lk.9, 1-6)

### **ii). The words of St. Columban**

From his letter to the French Bishops: “It is for Christ the Saviour, our common Lord and God, that I have come to these lands as a pilgrim. I beseech you therefore by our common Lord to allow me with your peace and charity to remain in silence in these woods and live beside the bones of our seventeen dead brethren, just as up till now we have been allowed to live twelve years among you.” (*Letter 2, to the French bishops*)

### **iii). Reflection**

We have been touched by the call to mission at different moments in our lives. We have participated in parish missions, we have responded to people in need and reached out to them. There are times we have taken a prophetic stance and worked for justice and equality across the world. We have stood by those who went abroad as missionaries and have become part of their story. This is part of our pilgrim path and men and women like St. Columban inspire us to never lose sight of our missionary calling. Today, this live out our mission on every place where we live and work.

### **iv). Our Father ...**

## **Step 7. How awesome is this place!**

### **i). The Word of God**

From the Book of Genesis: “When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.’ He was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.’” (Gen. 28:16 -17)

### **ii). The Words of St.Columban**

From his first sermon: “It is no God dwelling far off from us that we seek, whom if we merit it we have within us. For He resides in us like soul in body”. (*Sermon 1.1*)

From his third sermon: “Love yourself rightly, love yourself enough to choose your own happiness in choosing the way of God.” (*Sermon 3*)

### **iii). Reflection**

The community and place where we live is an awesome place, a blessed place. It is in this place that we meet our God. As pilgrims are invited to assume the reality of our lives with all its limitations. While living locally, we are called to have a global view of the world.

### **iv). Our Father ...**



## **Step 8. This is a holy land**

### **i). The Word of God**

From the Book of Psalms: “Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his command they were created, and he established them for ever and ever—he issued a decree that will never pass away.

Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and women, old men and children.

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendour is above the earth and the heavens.” (Ps.148: 5-14.)

### **ii). The word of St. Columban**

From his first sermon: “Understand the creation, if you wish to know the Creator; if you will not know the former either, be silent concerning the Creator, and believe in the Creator.” (*Sermon1,5*)

### **iii) Reflection**

We are on pilgrimage in this holy land, planet Earth. The whole Earth has been made holy by the God of Creation, our preferential option for the poor, our struggle for equality for women, justice for workers, dignity for peasants and miners, our respect for indigenous peoples and our dialogue with men and women of all faiths.

We thank God for clean water, for the Sun that gives light and heat, for the Moon, that drives the pulses of the oceans, for the stars that show us the mystery of the Universe.

Through all these things we grasp the power of God that permeates our entire being uniting us with all creation.

### **iv). Our Father ...**

## Step 9. We are Pilgrims for Christ.

### i). The Word of God

From the Gospel according to St. Luke: “As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.” (Lk. 24: 28-31)

### ii). The words of St. Columban

From his eight sermon: “Then, lest we be concerned with human things, let us concern ourselves with things divine, and as pilgrims ever sigh for and desire our homeland; for the end of the road is ever the object of travellers’ hopes and desires, and thus, since we are travellers and pilgrims in the world, let us ever ponder on the end of the road, that is of our life, for the end of our roadway is our home... Therefore let this principle abide with us, that on the road we so live as travellers, as pilgrims, as guests of the world”. (*Sermon 8*)

### iii). Reflection

Christ is present in our walk and our talk. Such was the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus, the risen One, accompanies us on the road of life. As we conclude our pilgrim way, we ask God that through the intercession of Saint Columban, he may enable us to be in all that we dream, say and do, a living memory of the risen Lord Jesus

### iv). Our Father ...



## Concluding prayers

### Litany of Saint Columban

Lord have mercy

R/. Christ have mercy

Lord have mercy

St. Columban.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, pilgrim and wanderer for Christ

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, monk and missionary.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, abbot and brother.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, contemplative and prophetic.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, defender of truth and freedom.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, dove of peace.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, friend of nature.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, lover of animals.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, protector of the environment.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, healer of the sick.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, courageous and fearless.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, forgiving and rich in mercy.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, promoter of justice, peace and integrity.

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, true to the Word of God

R/. Pray for us

St. Columban, intercede to God for us.

R/. Pray for us

Oh Lord hear our prayer

R/. And grant us your salvation

### **Prayers of Intercession**

For the pilgrim Church in every land

R/. May it be filled, guided and governed by your Holy Spirit.

For our Holy Father Pope Francis

R/. Continue to bestow on him your wisdom to guide him in his service of leading, inspiring, challenging and unifying the Church.

For the religious leaders of the world

R/. Come with your unfailing help and give them your strength in their ministry and service to God and his people.

For missionaries throughout the world

R/. Bless their work that all people may know the light of Christ.

For the sick and those who have asked for our prayers

R/. Comfort and strengthen them and keep us attentive to their needs.

For the imprisoned, those deprived of their freedom and those undergoing persecution

R/. Give them strength of mind and body and fill them with your hope.

For those committed to interreligious dialogue, justice and peace and caring for planet earth

R/. Give them prophetic courage to be authentic witnesses of the Gospel.

For the intentions of our families, friends of St. Columban throughout the world, and those who watch out and care for us

R/. Keep them in your loving care and bless them with good health.

For vocations

R/. Inspire many young men and women to answer your call to married, priestly, religious and missionary life.

For ourselves and those with whom we presently live

R/. May your presence be upon us that we may live in love.

For our deceased family members, and those who have been close to us during their lives

R/. May they rest in peace and enjoy the company of the angels, saints and martyrs in the Kingdom of heaven.

### **Prayer by Saint Columban**

Lord, May everything we do this day begin with your blessing and continue with your help. May everything we say this day begin with your love and continue with your grace. May everything we plan this day begin with your inspiration and continue with your peace. So that throughout our lives all that we begin in you may by you be happily ended, all that we seek through you may be lovingly attended. Amen

### **Blessing:**

May God Bless us,

May Jesus, Our Lord be with us in all our journeys,

May the Holy Spirit guide, direct and keep us safe. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Words of St. Columban are taken from:

O'Fiaich, Tomás *Columbanus in his own words*. Veritas1974

O'Hara, Alexander *Saint Columbaus, selected writings*. Veritas 2015



[www.columban.com](http://www.columban.com)