

Lives of Saints

St Columban

543(?) - 615

Feast day: 23rd November



“Let us be of
Christ, not of
ourselves.”

St Columban

I was born in Leinster, in Ireland. As a young man I was greatly tormented by temptations of the flesh, and sought the advice of a religious woman who had lived a hermit's life for years. I saw in her answer a call to leave the world. I went first to a monk on an island in Lough Erne, then to Bangor. At Bangor, sanctity and scholarship were prized, and I became a teacher in the monastic school there.

After thirty years of seclusion and prayer at Bangor, I travelled to Gaul with 12 companion missionaries. Here, devastation of the barbarian invasions had completely disrupted civil and religious life. But we won wide respect for the rigor of our discipline, our preaching, and our commitment to charity and religious life in a time characterized by clerical slackness and civil strife. I established several monasteries in Europe which became centres of religion and culture.

Of course, I met a lot of opposition as well. For instance, the Frankish bishops themselves found difficulty with some Irish customs that I had introduced. I also found myself in trouble when I reproved the king for his licentious life, insisting that he marry. Since this threatened the power of the queen mother, I was deported back to Ireland. However, my ship ran aground in a storm, and I continued my work in Europe, ultimately arriving in Italy, where I found favour with the king of the Lombards.

In my last years I established the famous monastery of Bobbio where I died. My writings include a treatise on penance and against the heresy of Arianism, as well as sermons, poetry and my monastic rule.

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