

February 1: Saint Brigid's Feast Day and Imbolc

Imbolc marks the time when the Earth begins to awaken, everything begins to grow and we move toward the light half of the year. The Celtic calendar celebrates the beginning of Spring, Imbolc, on February 1, and the feast of Saint Brigid of Kildare who was associated with healing, peace and a great concern for those who were poor.



A Prayer to Saint Brigid

Saint Brigid.
You were a woman of peace.
You brought harmony where there was conflict.
You brought light to the darkness.
You brought hope to the downcast.
May the mantle of your peace cover those who are troubled and anxious, and may peace be firmly rooted in our hearts and in our world.
Inspire us to act justly and to reverence all God has made.
Brigid you were a voice for the wounded and the weary.
Strengthen what is weak within us.
Calm us into a quietness that heals and listens.
May we grow each day into greater wholeness in mind, body and spirit.
Amen.

Image: The Icon of St. Brigid by Sister Aloysius McVeigh, RSM.

Reflection: Brigid as Archetype of the Healer

Excerpted and adapted from *Illuminating the Way: Embracing the Wisdom of Monks and Mystics* by Christine Valters Paintner (Coming April, 2022 from Ave Maria Press).

The Healer is the one who helps us to overcome inner divisions of body, mind, soul, heart, and spirit. Healing is very different than curing. We might have an illness which does not alleviate, but the Healer within allows us to find some wisdom and grace in the experience, allows us to have some peace and ease in the midst of unknowing and pain.

Similarly, with emotional wounds, the Healer is the one who helps us to welcome in the stranger and find reconciliation and perhaps even gratitude for these parts of self that have for so long vexed us.

Healing is not so much about “doing” but about a way of “being” that lies beyond all the false divisions we make in our lives. Healing often inspires radical life changes and brings about ways of being more in alignment with our True Self and nature.

The Healer is not only present in the traditional practice of medicine, or other healing arts such as herbalism, massage, energy work, midwifery, and so forth. The Healer also works through spiritual direction, retreat work, psychotherapy, and any ways that a person accesses this archetypal aspect of self to foster an overcoming of divisions.

We each carry the great wounds of life, but some of us will become victimized by them and let them ultimately tear us apart. While some of us will slowly find empowerment and a call to be in service

to others. We may resist our wounds, but the ancient stories tell us the wound is where the jewels are hidden. Wounding can become a process of initiation into a way of being which honors the wounds of human life and approaches with reverence and gentleness, creates spaces where the wounds are made welcome.

Brigid reminds us that ultimately, we must turn within, and find the inner Healer at work, call upon her or his wisdom for us. It can be confusing when we are ill and there are so many possible modalities for healing. When we pause and turn to the Healer, we have inside of us, we can ask for the way forward. This doesn't mean that we don't seek the healing gifts of others, but that we don't give away our power to heal in that relationship.



Reflection Questions

Is it comforting to depict Brigid as Healer?

What thoughts, feelings, or insights does the image of the Icon of St. Brigid bring to mind?

Close your eyes, relax your body, imagine yourself with Brigid the Healer. Get in touch with the Healer that is deep inside of you. What is it you desire?

Listen to the hymn *Gabhaim molta Bríde*, or “Praise to Saint Brigid”

Sung by Deirdre Ni Chinneide, from I Will Sing for You:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HjOXqKmcNE>

*Gabhaim molta Bríghde, iníon í le hÉireann
Iníon le gach tír í, molaimís go léir í.
Lóchrann geal na Laighneach, soils' ar feadh na tíre
Ceann ar óigheacht Éireann, ceann na mban ar míne.*

I give praise to Brigid, daughter of Ireland
Daughter of all lands, let us praise her.
The bright torch of Leinster, shining across the country
The leader of Ireland's youth, leader of gentle women.

*Tig an Geimhreadh dian dubh, gearra lena géire
Ach ar lá le Bríghde, gar dúinn Earrach Éireann.
Iníon le gach tír í, molaimís go léir í.
Gabhaim molta Bríghde, iníon í le hÉireann*

The house of Winter is dark, cutting with its sharpness
But on Brigid's Day, Spring in Ireland draws near to us.
I give praise to Brigid, daughter of Ireland
Daughter of all lands, let us praise her.

Closing Prayer

Thank you for the wisdom of our ancestors who marked the turning of the seasons and celebrated the coming of spring. May we rejoice in the growing light of the sun, remembering the eternal flame of Brigid. Pray for us Brigid, bringer of joy, light bearer, healer. As the dead of winter begins to turn into the life of spring, may this be a time of healing. God bless the earth that is beneath us, the growth that is around us, the spring that is before us, your life deep within us. May it be so.



Imbolc marks the first day of Spring in Ireland.