

Genesis 1:1-5 Windows to God – An Exploration of Celtic Spirituality

02.03.08

(Listening for the Heartbeat of God – Discovering God’s Will - Part IV)

Homily

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

All things came into being through him, and God saw creation and it was good.

What does it mean for Christ to be in all things, and for God to look at all of creation and to say, “It is good.”

For the past four weeks we have been on a journey to discover the will of God.

We have agreed that there are far too many people who claim to know the mind of God and do horrible things, so we are hesitant to say we know God’s will or we know the mind of God.

But all things being equal, most of us agree that our work will have more meaning,

our relationships will have more value,

and ultimately our lives will be deeper,

if we are better attuned to the will of God,

so we have set out on this journey to think about how we can discover God’s will.

First of all, we have to admit that in our modern era,

Technology, with all of its benefits,

doesn’t really foster the spiritual life.

We wake up in the morning,

Some of us make a point to have quiet time,

then the day begins.

And through the power of the internet,

Headlines at our finger tips,

Emails to greet us in the morning,

The chime of Windows seemingly everywhere,

We are bombarded with information.

In some ways it is beautiful,

But as far as discerning the will of God,
And sensing God's direction,
It's probably not what Jesus had in mind when he said:
"Come to me all you who are weary, for I will give you rest.
Take my yoke and learn from me."

That's why today we are going on a bit of a side journey,
And listen to the wisdom of Celtic spirituality,

Today, we will take a brief tour of Celtic Spirituality and listen to some of the prayers of the Celt's.

Before we begin, let me say this:

Today's sermon will be a failure if we finish and you think to yourself,
"That was a stimulating intellectual exercise."

My hope is that we will go a journey of Celtic spirituality and in the end, you will say two things to yourself, "One, I'm inspired by how the Celts lived and prayed," and two, "In today's world, I need to pray differently."

This is not meant to be an esoteric exercise. OK?

First, some history.

In the year of 664 A.D., a Synod of the Catholic Church met to make a decision about Christianity and the leadership of a woman that would alter the complexion of Christianity in Britain and perhaps much of the Western world. It was the Synod of Whitby, and the abbess was Hilda. The monastery in question was a Celtic community, and in attendance were representatives from Rome and Northern England. The Celtic leaders had come through... Iona, and deferred to the authority of Saint John. The others had come through... Canterbury and before that Rome, and recognized the preeminence of Saint Peter. The synod was convened by Oswy, King of Northumbria, and intended to resolve the conflict between two dramatically different spiritual perspectives. The Celtic mission, inspired by John, encouraged followers to listen of the heartbeat of God in ordinary life. The Roman mission, on the other hand, argued for the authority of Peter, and pushed ... for action and outward unity. The king decided in favor of the Roman mission, and the Celtic mission began its formal decline.¹

¹ Listening to the Heartbeat of God, p. 1-2.

Through the centuries, Celtic spirituality rose up through the people and was cut down by the authorities, but through all of the years it has endured.

And here is my thesis for the morning.
I believe that our new information age, as glorious as it may be,
to connect us,
to create efficiencies,
to meet needs quickly,
as wonderful as it is, I believe the information age,
can function like the council of Whitby;

and virtually blind us to the presence of God in daily life.

So, as a response to a new era, where we have access to so much information, but at the same time have been deprived of so much wisdom, I would like to take a tour, of Celtic prayers, and invite you to consider how you could use these prayers in your daily life.

To begin, Celtic prayers were used through out the day.
Many people had a habit of beginning and ending their day with prayer.
In one region, the Hebrides, it was the custom for men to take off their cap to the sun in the morning,
and for women to bend their knee to the moon at night.
As Karen said earlier, this should not be mistaken as worshipping nature, it was a way to worship God, as witnessed in creation.
As one woman says: “(When I bend my knee)I thank *God* for the golden-bright sun of virtues giving us warmth and light by day,
and the white moon of the seasons giving us guidance and leading by night.”

A wonderful aspect of Celtic prayers is their reverence for creation, and the way a person praying would move back and forth, between the physical and the spiritual.

Celtic prayers can change the way we pray.

Instead of our prayers being a dialogue between us and a distant God, what if we looked outside, gave thanks for the snow, felt greeted by Christ, and then began our prayer.

Or what if our prayers sounded more like this Celtic prayer:

Jesu, Jesu, Jesu

There is no plant in the ground, but is full of your virtue.

There is no form in the strand, but is full of God' blessing.
Jesu, be praised.

There is no life in the sea, there is no creature in the river, there is naught in
the firmament, but proclaims Thy goodness,
Jesu, Jesu.

There is no bird on the wing, there is no star in the sky, there is nothing
under the sun, but proclaims thy goodness
Jesu be praised.²

Amen

Despite the harshness and destructive potential of creation, there was a sense
of God's grace being released through the elements.

Listen to this weave of grace and creation.

The grace of the love of the skies be thine.
The grace of the love of the stars be thine,
the grace of the love of the moon be thine,
the grace of the love of the sun be thine.

God's presence isn't limited to nature;
Christ is woven through all of life.
God is present in our work, and our hobbies,
even wholly present in romance.

Listen to this prayer of The Duchess of Argyll:

There is a youth comes wooing me, O King of Kings,
may he succeed.
Would he were stretched upon my breast
with his body against my skin.³

It's hardly the sort of prayer that we could imagine coming from the lips of
John Calvin,
let alone Mrs. Calvin.

But it reflects God's nearness in all of life.

² Listening to the Heartbeat of God, p, 42-43.

³ Listening, p. 47.

The essence of Celtic spirituality may be most beautifully reflected in a prayer attributed to Saint Patrick.

Christ enfold me
Christ to surround me
Christ in my speaking
Christ in my thinking

Christ in my sleeping
Christ in my walking
Christ in my watching
Christ in my hoping.
Christ in my life
Christ in my lips
Christ in my soul
Christ in my heart.

Christ in my sufficing
Christ in my slumber
Christ in mine ever living soul.
Christ in my eternity.⁴

Those who see Celtic spirituality as worshipping nature miss the boat.
Celtic spirituality never bids us to worship nature alone.
It invites the faithful to see God everywhere.

Some of you hearing these prayers this morning may be moved.
You may be inspired to go online this week and download this sermon or
Google “Celtic spirituality” so that you can use Celtic prayers in your life.
But some of you may still be saying “So what!”
What does Celtic spirituality have to do with my every day life and
discerning the will of God?
Here is why Celtic spirituality may be really helpful today.

In a day when “Windows” refers to a computer program that you see on a
computer screen,
Celtic prayers may provide you with windows to see the presence of God.

⁴ Listening, p. 48.

And when we see God in the morning sun and the evening stars,
When we see God in a newborn's face or the wrinkles by an old friend's
eyes,
When we see God in the lengthening of days or the quickening of heartbeats,
When we notice the presence of God woven through creation and much of
life,
we'll be more inclined to sense God's will.

We're not given a secret code to discover God's will!
Celtic spirituality functions more like a good relationship than a magic ring.

Consider one of your closer friends.
When you see a friend more often, and you share the week's events, or listen
to one another's highs and lows; you're much more likely to know what they
are thinking.
If you have a great dilemma, you ask them what to do, because that's what
good friends do.
But before you even ask their opinion, often, you have a good idea of what
they are thinking.
That's one of the beautiful gifts of practicing Celtic Spirituality.
Not only do we see God everywhere and notice we're not alone,
but we are given a sense of what God would have us do before we even ask
because God is near.

Wouldn't it be beautiful if ever time we looked at the morning sun ...
we were reminded of God's presence;
Every time we saw the sun set...
we were reminded of our need for God;
Every time we took our first breath in the morning...
we were reminded that God breathed into the dust, and gave us life?
Wouldn't it be beautiful if every time we saw the sun in the morning...
we were reminded that God said: "Let there be light, and there was light?"
Wouldn't it be wonderful if every time we faced a difficult decision...
we were reminded that God is not watching us from a distance but God is
woven through all of life,
speaking through creation and speaking to us through community,
scripture, and all of life?
Wouldn't it be wonderful, if every time we even made small decisions...
we felt a breeze against our skin,

and we were reminded that the breath of God gave us life
and moves through us still?

Wouldn't it be wonderful if every time we heard... (**Window's chimes**)
we were reminded that Christ is woven throughout all of life,
waiting, whispering, and wanting to guide our feet and direct our ways.
Amen