

A CELTIC LITURGY

For Tony and Barbara

A CELTIC LITURGY



Pat Robson

SPCK

Originally published in Great Britain in 2000
by HarperCollinsReligious

Published in Great Britain in 2008
in hardback

Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
36 Causton Street
London SW1P 4ST
www.spck.org.uk

Reprinted once
Second (paperback) edition 2015

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library

ISBN 978-0-281-07410-5

Printed in Great Britain by Ashford Colour Press
Subsequently digitally printed in Great Britain

Produced on paper from sustainable forests

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vi
<i>Foreword by the Rt Revd William Ind, former Bishop of Truro</i>	vii
<i>Introduction</i>	ix
1 Prayers before Worship	1
2 Early Morning Prayer	8
3 Morning Prayer	11
4 Evening Prayer	23
5 Night Prayer	37
6 A Service of Marriage	39
7 A Service of Gathering	48
8 A Celtic Eucharist	53
9 In Praise of Creation	58
10 A Funeral Service	69
11 A Service of Healing	74
12 Prayers of Intercession	83
13 A Celtic Calendar	96
14 Selected Psalms	145
15 Historical Overview	168

Acknowledgements

My grateful thanks go to Caroline Moore for allowing us to use her prayer for St Aidan's Chapel. Thanks also to Glenys Lewis for patiently typing the script, and to the staff at the public library in Holyhead for their help in confirming the dates of feast days and the lives of the saints.

Prayers and verses attributed to *Gormola Kernewek* (Cornish Praise) are taken from a collection of prayers and poems composed by the author.

Selected Psalms on pages 145–67 are taken from the Book of Common Prayer, the rights in which are vested in the Crown, and are reproduced by permission of the Crown's Patentee, Cambridge University Press.

Bible quotations have been taken from the following sources:

ASB	Alternative Service Book
BCP	Book of Common Prayer
GNB	Good News Bible
KJV	King James Version
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version

Foreword

by the Rt Revd William Ind, former Bishop of Truro

When we hear the Bible read in church or read it ourselves at home, it is very easy to miss the fact that most of the great events recorded in Scripture take place not indoors but in the open air. We need to remind ourselves of that constantly – that God is the Lord of all that is and not just a part of life that can be conveniently labelled ‘religious’.

The contemporary interest in Celtic spirituality is a real antidote to this narrowing down, and *A Celtic Liturgy* is a real example of it. This book takes Creation seriously and finds God within it. Wind and rain, sun and snow, everyday experiences, all have their part and their place. But this is not nature worship or a book of New Age liturgies, because it is Christocentric and rooted in tradition.

There are services for different times of the day and for other occasions such as the blessing of a marriage or for a funeral. There is also a very useful Celtic calendar, which gives short histories of the saints as well as the saint’s day and Bible readings and a collect for each of them.

Some of the material in this book is ancient and some modern, and both are evidence of the rich continuous tradition. Here in Cornwall we are surrounded by physical signs of this tradition, with many Celtic crosses and churches dedicated to Celtic saints. Pat Robson is herself a priest in such a place, and what gives the book an extra dimension and freshness is that the author herself expresses the Celtic tradition by the way she exercises her ministry in her parish and far beyond. There is an openness to all that is, and a sense always that God is here, wherever here is.

+ BILL

Introduction

When Jesus walked on earth and worked among men he was often lonely and tired. The people who crowded around him begging for help gave him no space. He worked late into the night and he felt power leave him when he healed, but his compassion was such that he could not hold back. He found it hard to pace himself in the face of such need. When the crowds were gone to their beds, and only then, tired as he was, he would slip away into the hills to pray alone.

In prayer Jesus became transformed. He melted into God. (Matthew 17:1-5)

In prayer he was strengthened to continue his work. (Mark 1:35)

In prayer he was comforted and affirmed.
(Luke 22:39-43)

Like Jesus, when we pray we too become transformed, strengthened, comforted and affirmed. We are 'dipped again in God and new created' (an expression from D.H. Lawrence's poem 'Shadows').

When we try to pray the Celtic way we need to make Christ our friend and talk to him in a very simple manner. It is important not to use words or phrases that we do not understand. It is also important to keep the conversation going.

The Celtic saints prayed by chatting to their loving Saviour as they walked through life. Their favourite prayers, songs and psalms were committed to memory and stored in the treasury of the mind, to be dipped into and drawn upon when needed. The rhythm of a prayer made remembering easy.

The Celtic saints sang their praises to the skies. Knowing the psalms and their chosen prayers by heart, they were saved from poring over books as they worshipped. Modern churchgoers might find their manner crude and oversimplified, but if we want to recreate in some way the naturalness and verve of their worship, we must become less inhibited and avoid any affectations of piety. Instead we should strive to be observant and appreciative of the world around us, wondering and reverent of God's awesome power, and impulsive in love.

The early saints were hard on themselves. They were disciplined and strict about their practices, many of which we would consider very harsh. Despite all this, however, there was no room for religiosity in Christian Celtic spirituality. Affectation and ritual were abhorred. The Eucharist, very simply celebrated and distributed, would have been the only 'formal' service known to them.

For our part, because we are no longer so close to the created world around us, there seems to be a need for a simple liturgy to help us recapture something of the essence of the spirituality of the early Celtic Christians, and that is what this book sets out to provide.

The book will give you some idea of prayers to pray and readings to read, but each moment of prayer will be unique to you as an individual, so revel in the uniqueness of the moment and allow your individuality to make its mark. Different prayers will appeal at different times. Learn the ones you like by rote and speak them from your heart.

It is you who are loved by God. It is your prayers he wants to hear. The form of service is irrelevant. Do not let it become your master.

To help you use this book

Usage

Some of the prayers and services are for the use of individuals praying alone, especially Early Morning Prayer and Night Prayer, and the first section of 'Prayers before Worship' is marked for this purpose. Others are clearly for group use, whether in church or in a more informal setting.

The Caim

The Early Morning Prayer contains a *Caim* (pronounced 'kyme'). The Caim was used by Celtic Christians to create a shield of protection around themselves before they ventured out into the world. With the index finger of the right hand raised and extended, turn clockwise three times, drawing a circle around yourself in the air. As you turn, pray out loud for the protection of the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to keep you safe from harm and to keep you always surrounded by the presence of God.

The Caim is also used in the Service of Healing which occurs later in the book, in order to surround those who are seeking healing with the love and protection of God. If there are several people to be encircled and the space is small, the minister could draw this circle in the air above and towards the people. Alternatively, it may be possible for those who are assisting the minister in the healing to stand around the outside of the group with arms outstretched to form a circle while the words are being said.

Adaptation

All the services can be adapted to suit the occasion, and ministers should feel free to be inventive. Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, for example, can both be shortened by stopping the service after the Gloria and starting it again with the Lord's Prayer. An asterisk (*) marks the beginning and end of the section which can be left out.

It is always a good idea to encourage as many people as possible to take an active part in the services. The role of the Reader is an important one. He or she keeps the service moving and enables the minister's role to be more sacramental in nature. Where several Readers or Speakers are suggested, as in the Service of Healing, the idea is to encourage people to identify themselves with issues that are important to them. If it is not easy to find enough people, the words can be adapted for use by one Reader only. Likewise, if a reading might be better expressed using more than one Reader, you should feel free to adapt or divide up the material accordingly.

Readings and prayers

The choices of Celtic readings are printed out in full within each service so that it is not necessary to use several books. A Celtic Calendar (pages 96–144) lists relevant saints' days and gives an account of each saint's life which can be read out, together with a collect and suggested Gospel and Psalm readings. The Psalms appointed for each Celtic saint's day can be found in full on pages 145–67.

There are also sections giving a selection of prayers and poems to use before worship (pages 1–7) and in intercessions (pages 83–95). The only other books you may need will be a Bible and a hymn book.

A local language could be used for familiar prayers such as the Lord's Prayer if appropriate.




Try to choose hymns to suit the mood and occasion and, if you can do it without unduly lengthening the service, feel free to put in extra hymns where you wish.

Choice of venue

If you are holding any of the services out of doors, be sympathetic to your congregation's needs and provide wind breaks, shelter and seating where necessary. A room or church building which has a simple wild flower decoration, a view from a window or a soft lighting effect can often be just as pleasing and certainly more comfortable for the worshippers than being outside. (If your congregation is determined to worship 'the Celtic way', perhaps they should be encouraged to stand up to their necks in icy water and recite all the Psalms, following the example of St Petroc!)

Blessings

Within the services you will find four kinds of blessing. Each is marked with its own symbol:

-  marks a point in the service where you may like to sign yourself with a sign of the cross.
-  marks a point in the service where the minister will individually bless those kneeling before him.
-  marks a point in the service where the minister uses the Orthodox method of blessing, sprinkling holy water three times in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This occurs in the Service of Marriage but could be used instead of other blessings where preferred.

✠ marks a point in the service where the minister blesses the whole congregation, usually at the end of a service.

I hope you find that the liturgy, prayers and readings stir your imagination and bring you a fresh vision and a real understanding of the God who created you and who loves you so much. God has walked by your side all your life. Why not reach out to him now and speak?

PAT ROBSON



PRAYERS BEFORE WORSHIP

Praying alone

Dear Lord
The noise and hurry
of the day
have broken their hold
and I have slipped away.

For this small moment in time
I am free
to melt into you.

(Gormola Kernewek)

* * *

My sweet Lord,
Draw me through the darkness
And open my eyes to your wondrous light.

(Gormola Kernewek)

* * *

High King of Heaven,
You stretch out the skies like a curtain
And lower the canopy of gentle night
To cool the heat of the day.
May your peace, dark, velvety and starlit,

Descend
To calm the wild beating of my heart,
That I may be still.

(Gormola Kernewek)

* * *

Let the rumble of traffic diminish
and the song of the birds grow clear
and may the Son of God come striding towards you
walking on these stones.

(Caroline Moore, for St Aidan's Chapel, Bradford Cathedral)

* * *

You are my hiding place O Lord.
You know me by my name.
My thoughts and deeds are seen by you
and their memory brings me pain.

I come to you with a tear-worn soul,
I come to you in grief.

I need the love from your loving heart
That I may be at peace.

Reach out my Lord and touch my soul
And cleanse me from my sin.
Reach out and draw me from the dark
And let your lovelight in.

Your love that fills my soul with joy,
That makes the wild wind sing.
In whiteness, brightness, claim my soul
My loving heavenly King.

(Gormola Kernewek)

Alone with none but you, my God,
 I journey on my way.
 What need I fear, when you are near,
 O King of night and day?
 More safe am I within your hand
 Than if a host did round me stand.

My life I yield to your command,
 And bow to your control,
 In peaceful calm, for from your arm
 No power can snatch my soul.
 Could earthly foes ever appal
 A soul that heeds the heavenly call?

(Attributed to St Columba, 6th century)

* * *

Dear, chaste Christ,
 Who can see into every heart and read every mind,
 Take hold of my thoughts.
 Bring my thoughts back to me
 And clasp me to yourself.

(Prayer of a Celtic monk, 8th century)

* * *

O Son of God, change my heart.
 Your spirit composes the songs of the birds and the
 buzz of the bees.
 I ask of you only one more miracle:
 Beautify my soul.

(Traditional)

Praying together

O God, we thank Thee for this universe our great home; for its vastness and its riches, and for the manifoldness of the life which teems upon it and of which we are part. We praise Thee for the arching sky and the blessed winds, for the driving clouds and the constellations on high.

We praise Thee for the salt sea and the running water, for the everlasting hills, for the trees, and for the grass under our feet. We thank Thee for our senses by which we can see the splendour of the morning, and hear the jubilant song of the birds, taste the autumn fruits, rejoice in the feel of snow and smell the breath of springtime.

Grant us, we pray Thee, a heart wide open to all this joy and beauty, and save our souls from being so steeped in care or so darkened by passion that we pass heedless and unseeing when even the thorn bush by the wayside is aflame with Thy glory.

O God, our creator who livest and reignest for ever and ever.

(Walter Rauschenbusch)

* * *

When we see the simple beauty of the wild flowers in our hedgerows and in our meadows, their colours glowing like jewels among the green summer leaves –

When we see the gulls wheeling high over the cliffs and hear the song of the cuckoo and the meadow lark in the clear morning air –

When we see the butterflies and hear the hum of insects as they hover among the flowers and the tall windblown grasses, and feel the gentle caress of the warm summer breeze –

Then, O Lord, our hearts are raised in joy and thanksgiving, for now the darkness of winter is left behind and the warmth of summer lies ahead.

This beauty, dear Lord, we see as a sign of your love, and we ask that in return you will accept our prayers and our praise, for they come from grateful hearts.

(Gormola Kernewek)

* * *

O Lord, who created the soaring hawk and the raindrop glistening on the bramble leaf, open our eyes to your great glory and set our hearts on fire with your praise.

(Gormola Kernewek)

* * *

Almighty God, we, your people, offer you grateful thanks for this time of refreshment in the midst of our busy lives.

May we, in the quiet and peace of this moment, lay before you ourselves, our hearts, our lives, to do with as you will.

Take from us the cares and worries of our world and let us learn from the beauty we see around us, to trust in your eternal goodness and strength.

The Celtic saints sang their praises to the skies. Knowing the psalms and their chosen prayers by heart, they were saved from poring over books as they worshipped. Modern churchgoers might find their manner crude and oversimplified, but if we want to recreate in some way the naturalness and verve of their worship, we must become less inhibited and avoid any affectations of piety. Instead we should strive to be observant and appreciative of the world around us, wondering and reverent of God's awesome power, and impulsive in love.

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