

IRISH SAINTS

Contributed by Brian P. Hegarty Jr.

Here is a list of some of the famous Irish saints we should know:

1. SAINT FINBAR --- Patron Saint of Cork

Saint Finbar was born in Connaught, the son of an artisan and a lady of the Irish royal court. He was named Fionnbahrr (meaning 'white head') by monks due to his light hair. His monastery became famous in southern Ireland and attracted numerous disciples. Many extravagant miracles are attributed to him, and supposedly, the sun did not set for two weeks after he died at Cloyne about the year 633. But we can't verify that.

2. SAINT BRIGID

Patron saint of Ireland, dairymaids, cattle, midwives, Irish nuns and new-born babies

Saint Brigid was born Brigit and shares a name with a Celtic goddess from whom many legends and folk customs are associated.

Brigid is celebrated for her generosity to the poor. In her case, most of the miracles associated with her relate to healing and household tasks usually attributed to women. Every year on St Brigid's feast day, 1 February, formerly celebrated as a pagan festival, children in Catholic schools in Ireland make Brigid's crosses – like the one Brigid is holding in the picture opposite.

The small cross usually woven from rushes. Typically, it has four arms tied at the ends and a woven square in the middle.

3. SAINT COLMCILLE

Patron saint of Derry, floods, bookbinders, poets, Ireland, Scotland

Saint Colmcille (Columba) was probably born in 521 in Co. Donegal.

After he was ordained, he left Ireland at the age of 42, possibly because of a family feud which resulted in the death of 3000 people which he was partly blamed for. He is one of the three chief saints of Ireland, after St Patrick and St Brigit of Kildare.

Moral of the story: don't get into a feud with St Columba.

4. SAINT OLIVER PLUNKETT

Patron saint of Peace and Reconciliation in Ireland

After he was ordained, due to religious persecution in his native land, it was not possible for Olive Plunkett to return to minister to his people. Therefore, Oliver taught in Rome until 1669, when he was appointed Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland. He soon established himself as a man of peace and set about visiting his people, establishing schools, ordaining priests, and confirming thousands.

Oliver Plunkett was beatified in 1920 and canonized in 1975, making him the first new Irish saint for almost 700 years, and the first of the Irish martyrs to be beatified.

He also has a whole street in Cork named after him, which is class.

5. SAINT ITA

Patron saint of Roman Catholic Diocese of Limerick

Saint Ita is an interesting fish. Born at Decies, Co. Waterford she refused to be married, and secured her father's permission to live a virginal life.

St Ita was said to embody the six virtues of Irish womanhood – wisdom, purity, beauty, musical ability, gentle speech and needle skills. Yes, we said needle skills. But things were different back in the year 475. Many extravagant miracles were attributed to her. In one of them she is reputed to have reunited the head and body of a man who had been beheaded; in another she lived entirely on food from heaven, which would save you a fortune on the weekly food shop.

6. SAINT AILBHE

Patron saint of Wolves

Saint Ailbhe was a bishop, preacher, and a disciple of St Patrick. In some records he is called Albeus and was noted for his charity and kindness, as well as his eloquent sermons.

It was claimed that he was left in the woods as an infant and suckled by a wolf, sort of life Ireland's answer to Tarzan.

Later, the legend goes an old she-wolf came to Ailbhe for protection from a hunting party, resting her head upon his breast. You can't beat cuddles with a she-wolf.

7. SAINT CATALDUS

Patron saint of Taranto, invoked for protection from plagues, droughts and storms

The story goes that Saint Cataldus' monastery was in Lismore, Co. Waterford but one day he ventured to Jerusalem, as you do.

On his way home his ship became wrecked in Taranto in Italy and the people begged him to stay and be their bishop, so he did.

Some of the miracles claimed in Cataldus' name include protecting the city against the plague and floods that, apparently, had occurred in neighboring areas.

When his coffin was reopened, it allegedly contained a golden Celtic cross and a stick carved from Irish oak featuring Celtic design which was to become Cataldus' emblem.

8. SAINT COLMAN OF STOCKERAU

Patron saint of Austria; Melk; patron of hanged men, horned cattle, and horses

Originally known as Colmán, he was an Irish pilgrim en route to the Holy Land when he was mistaken for a spy because of his strange appearance. He was tortured and hanged at Stockerau in Austria.

Legend states that Coleman's body remained incorruptible for 18 months, undisturbed by birds and beasts. The scaffolding he met his untimely death on is said to have taken root and to have blossomed with green branches.

We have no idea why he is patron saint of horned cattle and if you have gout, we recommend you consult your doctor.

9. SAINT COLUMBANUS

PATRON SAINT OF MOTORCYCLISTS

Saint Columbanus was an Irish missionary notable for founding several monasteries in Burgundy, Luxeuil, Switzerland and Italy which were known for their strict rules and their emphasis on corporal punishment. Sounds fun!

He performed many miracles including making a bear evacuate a cave at his biddings, destroying a cauldron of beer with his breath and taming a bear and yoking it to a plough. Basically, he was great with bears.

Also, good to know there's someone up there looking out for all the Hell's Angels.

10. SAINT GALL

Patron saint of birds, geese, poultry and Sweden

Saint Gall, or Gallus, was born in Ireland in 550 and was one of the traditional 12 companions of Saint Columbanus on his mission from Ireland to the continent.

A popular legend is that when St Gall was in the woods, he was sitting at a fire when a bear emerged from the bushes and charged at him.

He rebuked the bear, so awed by his presence it stopped its attack, gathered firewood and sat at the fire with him.

11. SAINT FIACRE

Patron saint of Gardeners and cab-drivers

Saints Fiacre set up a hospice for travellers which developed into the village of Saint-Fiacre in Seine-et-Marne. Many resorted to him for advice, and the poor, for relief. He sometimes miraculously restored to health those that were sick. The fame of Saint Fiacre's miracles of healing continued after his death as crowds visited his shrine for centuries after.

Weirdly, he has been taken on as the patron saint of cab-drivers of Paris. French cabs are called fiacres because the first establishment to let coaches on hire, in the middle of the seventeenth century, was in the Rue Saint-Martin, near the hotel Saint-Fiacre, in Paris.

Unfortunately, St Fiacre wasn't a big fan of women and banned them from his monastery. He was however, a dab hand with gardening and herbs.

12. SAINT ATHRACHT

Patron saint of Tourlestrane, Co. Sligo, Ireland

Saint Athracht, or Attracta, is traditionally listed as a daughter of a sixth century noble Irish family in County Sligo.

Her father opposed her religious vocation, but she went to St Patrick and made her vows to him before founding a hospice on Lough Gara.

Local tradition remembers her great healing powers. Her convents were famous for hospitality and charity to the poor. Today a local well is named after her, as is the new secondary school in Tubbercurry and a church in Kilmactigue.

13. SAINT DECLÁN OF ARDMORE

St. Patrick, Declan and Ailbe met up at Cashel where their respective areas of influence (bishoprics) seem to have been sorted.

St. Declan of Ardmore: Declan is considered to be one of the pre-Patrician saints. He was of noble blood. Colman, a local priest, baptized him. Later he went to Europe to continue his studies where he was ordained priest and possibly bishop. He settled in Ardmore (Waterford) and evangelized the Decies territory.

He is called "the Patrick of the Déisi". The traditional narrative about the coming Christianity to Ireland is that St. Patrick, the "apostle" and patron saint of Ireland, converted the whole country to Christianity in the fifth century. Most of the stories about Patrick are located in the northern half of the country. But there is a strong alternative narrative that holds that Christianity had come to the south of Ireland even before Patrick began evangelizing. The four saints included in this narrative are: Saints Ailbe of Emly, Declan of Ardmore, Ciaran of Saighir and Ibar of Begerin.

St. Ailbe and Declan as having a great bond of affection: "they loved one another like brothers". They even meet in Rome and are made bishops there before returning to Ireland. As Declan is coming home, on the road through Italy he meets Patrick (on his way to Rome and not yet a bishop). Patrick and Declan along with Ailbe meet up again at Cashel where their respective areas of influence seem to have been sorted out before King Aengus.

14. SAINT IBAR

A pre-Patrician Irish saint, who labored in the present County Wexford from 425 to 450, recognized the jurisdiction of St. Patrick, and was confirmed in his episcopacy. Thus, though a missionary before the arrival of the great national apostle, St. Ibar was a contemporary of St. Patrick, and is regarded as the patron of Begerin, in Wexford

harbor. Although at first not disposed to yield to St. Patrick he afterwards submitted and became his disciple. Much obscurity attaches to his early training, but about the year 480 he settled at Begerin, where he built an oratory and cell. In the "Life of St. Abban" it is stated that St. Ibar's retreat was soon peopled with numerous disciples from all parts of Ireland, and the "Litany of Aengus" invokes the three thousand confessors who placed themselves under St. Ibar's direction.

15. SAINT CIARÁN of SAIGIR

Ciarán was bishop of Saighir. He was one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland and is considered the first saint to have been born in Ireland. By one account Patrick sent Ciarán to precede him and directed him to build a monastery at the site of a well. When Ciarán asked how he should find this well, Patrick gave him a little bell, that would not ring until he reached the well. Ciarán is said to have met Patrick in Italy and made allegiance to him. Ciarán was one of the twelve men that Patrick, on his arrival, consecrated as helpers. he blessed a well so that "it had the taste of wine or honey for everyone who drank it got drunk as well as filled".

Folklore also relates many charming tales of St Ciarán's influence on wild animals. Tales tell of a fox, badger and wolf who worked with Ciarán and his monks to cut wood and build huts for the brothers. One day the fox stole Ciarán's shoes; upon which Ciarán ordered the badger to retrieve them. The badger found the fox, and bound him from head to tail, returning him to his master; the saint ordered the fox to repent for his sin as a monk would, and to return to his tasks as before.