

## St Ita Feastday 15th January

Today, a number of our towns/villages/ townlands bear the name of St Ita, e.g. Kilmeaden Co. Waterford and Killeedy and Kilmeedy Co Limerick ; (Kill (Cill) translates as 'church', the 'm/o' is 'my' and ead/eed is 'Ide', the Irish for Ita, thus 'the church of my Ita'. Ita, our 6th century saint is still honoured in our place names, revered in many parishes as well as being Patron of the Diocese of Limerick.

We ask who is this lady and what legacy has come down to us? . She was born in Kilmeaden, Co Waterford (now better known for it's cheese!). She came from a noble family of the highly respected family of the Deisi. Her family were Christian. (Christianity had arrived early in the south of the country, especially through the ministry of St Declan of Ardmore). The young girl imbibed the spirit of this relatively new religion. A strong characteristic of early Christianity in Ireland was a profound yet simple sense of our Triune God. Ita's personal relationship with God influenced her life and inspired her to give herself totally to Christ, renouncing marriage. Needless to say, this displeased her father but eventually he surrendered to her desire.

Ita spent much time in prayer discerning how the Holy Spirit was leading her. In time, she set up Christian communities all over Munster. Eventually she arrived at Killeedy, Co Limerick where she hoped to have time for contemplation in solitude. However, people came to her and wanted to follow her life-style. To respond to this need Ita established a monastic community. People also wanted their children to be influenced by Ita's wisdom so in time she set up an education centre as well. Her most famous pupil was St Brendan, the Navigator. Ita is often referred to as 'the foster mother of the Saints of Ireland'.

Today, there is great devotion to St Ita, especially in Co Limerick. Masses are offered and other celebrations are organised in her honour especially on or near, Jan 15th. In Killeedy, the local people are very faithful to making the 'rounds of prayer' on this day at her Shrine and holy well, irrespective of weather conditions. The local GAA football club has St Ita as their Patron.

The influence of our 6th century Saint is still alive in our midst and is an encouragement for us at this time.

Helen Grealy