

## Spiritual Spring on Tap

As an island nation we are reminded on a regular basis of the strength and omnipotence of water. We can admire its power in the crashing waves which lash our coastline, shaping the very detail of our geography. At the same time we struggle against the effects of its incessant presence as farmers try to till the soggy land or floods threaten homes and livelihoods or we simply feel the need to scramble abroad for a week of sunshine away from the rain.

The control and accessibility of this natural resource for our human needs stirred the country's passions in recent times as people and politicians laboured to reach consensus on how best to ensure a continued supply of water. The prospect of a specific charge for water brought thousands on to the streets and focused attention on something that we probably have always taken for granted. Approaches of the past are being challenged by realities of the present as the increasing demand for water causes economic and logistical pressures and we find ourselves answerable to policy framed not in Dáil Éireann but Brussels.

It is against this background and within the context of an Ireland ever ancient but always new, that the suggestion of a Holy Wells Day finds itself. A day to celebrate the presence among us, in every county, of sacred springs which supplied not only a material substance but were that veil between the hidden and the visible, a reminder of a life source outside of our efficacy. Through generations countless peoples' thirst for spiritual revitalisation was crystallised around the Holy Well, often associated with a woman or man whose life spoke of eternal truths. That quest to touch the hem of sanctity brought men and women with their burdens and questions to these hallowed spaces where the holy water was regarded as a source of healing and renewal.

Up to the present day in many communities there remains a reverence for the Holy Well and they continue to draw people in a spirit of faith and hope. Our rationalised and medicalised approach to many of life's problems seems not to preclude a yearning for the spiritual embrace symbolised by these wells, speaking to us of God's nearness and constancy.

Tackling the great issues of the day as a society or simply coping with the vagaries of life as we experience them can often leave us with that feeling of being drained, parched, running on empty. Confronted by inadequacy or ineptitude from government or institution of any form, we can appear vision-less, a people stumbling around in the dark. Yet, the gift of the Holy Wells acting as beacons within our local communities brings us back to the truth of who we are and where our nurturance can be truly found. In the simple but humble act of reaching down into the well to bless ourselves or to drink, we express in a powerful manner our true sense of powerlessness as human beings, that we live the length of our days within the ambit of God's grace – giving presence. In the plans we make and the agenda we set, we are always contingent and dependent and thirsty for that is in the nature of who we are and there is no need to pretend otherwise. To pause in prayer and silence at the nearby holy well is an acknowledgement of our reality as creatures of the Creator. To do so with family, friends and neighbours gives expression to the bonds which reveal the immanence of God, a Meitheal feeding our deepest needs. A time when we can reveal our frailty by the quiet

solidarity of following in the footsteps of previous generations and so indicating that where they have gone, we too will follow – eternity in time.

The special day to celebrate our Holy Wells provides us also with a great opportunity to connect mindfully with our sisters and brothers around the globe who are denied the basic necessity of water. As siblings of the one planet where human need and human greed so often contest what is intended for all, we can form an intention by the holy wells to strengthen our resolve to support all engaged in meaningful action to alleviate drought induced suffering.

So, on June 18<sup>th</sup>, a gift is extended to us to connect with one another in the places we call home where holy wells have long existed. To gather, to pause, to pray and to immerse ourselves in an experience of life-giving community where the spiritual nature of who we are is honoured and enhanced.

*Friend of The Columba Community*