

St Enda

Feastday March 21st

St Enda was a major contributor to the unique way Christianity developed in Ireland. From the 6th century onwards monastic communities of prayer, scholarship and artistic expression were to be found throughout the country. These places were the bedrock of our Christianity. Many of the founders of these monasteries had first spent time with Enda on Inis Mór, Aran Islands, Co. Galway.

Enda himself was originally more interested in the life of a warrior. Influenced by his sister Fainche, he decided to dedicate his life to God. Enda spent some time in formation in the monastic way of life in Scotland at Candida Casa or the 'Great Monastery' founded by St Ninian in Whithorn, Galloway. When he returned to Ireland he founded his own monastery at Killeany (Cill Éanna/Éinne, the Church of Enda), Inis Mór. His simple austere way of life attracted so many followers that Aran became known as 'Aran of the Saints'. Today, there are monastic ruins and holy wells throughout the island.

Enda was obviously a man of God, a wisdom figure. While many of his disciples stayed on this outpost in the Atlantic, others felt called to move onward. St Finnian was one of those. The monastery he set up in Clonard, Co Meath became a very large and famous centre of learning. So, between the prayer, work and study of Enda and Finnian, Irish monasticism was born.

St Ciarán was also a disciple of Enda. One night both Enda and Ciarán had the same vision or image. The birds of the air came to a great tree to be nourished and then flew away to different places. Enda told Ciarán that he, Ciarán, was that tree and that he was to go and set up his own monastery. This came to pass at Clonmacnoise, Co.Offaly. Clonmacnoise flourished as a place of prayer, study, art and pilgrimage for many centuries.

St Brendan came to Aran to be blessed by Enda before he set off on his famous Atlantic voyage.

Today, a number of people, colleges and holy wells bear the name Enda.

Helen Grealy