

# Celtic Spirituality And Poetry

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*When we approach  
with reverence, great  
things decide to  
approach us. Our  
real life comes to the  
surface and its light  
awakens the  
concealed beauty in  
things. When we walk  
on the earth with  
reverence, beauty  
will decide to trust  
us. The rushed heart  
and arrogant mind  
lack the gentleness  
and patience to enter  
that embrace.*

*— John O'Donohue,  
Beauty: The Invisible  
Embrace*





*The Guiding Light of Eternity*

O God, who broughtest me from the rest of last night  
Upon the joyous light of this day,  
Be Thou bringing me from the new light of this day  
Unto the guiding light of eternity.  
Oh! from the new light of this day  
Unto the guiding light of eternity.

Originally from the *Carmina Gadelica I*, 33  
Taken from Esther de Waal, editor, *The Celtic Vision* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph,  
1988, 2001), p. 20

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**The Sun**

Have you ever seen  
anything  
in your life  
more wonderful

than the way the sun,  
every evening,  
relaxed and easy,  
floats toward the horizon

and into the clouds or the hills,  
or the ruffled sea,  
and is gone—  
and how it slides again

out of the blackness,  
every morning,  
on the other side of the world,  
like a red flower

streaming upward on its heavenly oils,  
say, on a morning in early summer,  
at its perfect imperial distance—  
and have you ever felt for anything  
such wild love—  
do you think there is anywhere, in any language,  
a word billowing enough  
for the pleasure

that fills you,  
as the sun  
reaches out,  
as it warms you

as you stand there,  
empty-handed—  
or have you too  
turned from this world—

or have you too  
gone crazy  
for power,  
for things?

- Mary Oliver

J. Philip Newell reports that in the Western Hebrides of Scotland there is a tradition that on Easter morning, the sun dances in celebration of the resurrection of Christ. In an account recorded by Alexander Carmichael in the 19th Century, found in his *Carmina Gadelica*, a woman tells of climbing the highest hill on Easter morning and seeing the sun dancing in delight:

*The glorious gold-bright sun was rising on the crests of the great hills, and it was changing color—green, purple, red, blood-red, intense white, and gold-white, like the glory of the God of the elements to the children of men. It was dancing up and down in exultation at the joyous resurrection of the beloved Savior of victory.”*

Fanciful though this may seem, the story gives us a sense of the Celtic awareness of creation and resurrection being held together in Christ. The Savior’s rising from the dead, making the whole creation new, is cause for the sun itself to rejoice.

## **The Three**

Originally from the *Carmina Gadelica III*, 63 Taken from Esther de Waal, editor, *The Celtic Vision* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1988, 2001), p. 19

In name of Father,  
In name of Son,  
In name of Spirit,  
Three in One:

Father cherish me,  
Son cherish me,  
Spirit cherish me,  
Three all-kindly.

God make me holy,  
Christ make me holy,  
Spirit make me holy,  
Three all-holy.

Three aid my hope,  
Three aid my love,  
Three aid mine eye,  
And my knee from stumbling,  
My knee from stumbling.

## **The Peace of Wild Things**

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

— Wendell Berry

May the blessing of light be on you - light without and light within.  
May the blessed sunlight shine on you like a great peat fire,  
so that stranger and friend may come and warm himself at it.  
And may light shine out of the two eyes of you,  
like a candle set in the window of a house,  
bidding the wanderer come in out of the storm.  
And may the blessing of the rain be on you,  
may it beat upon your Spirit and wash it fair and clean,  
and leave there a shining pool where the blue of Heaven shines,  
and sometimes a star.  
And may the blessing of the earth be on you,  
soft under your feet as you pass along the roads,  
soft under you as you lie out on it, tired at the end of day;  
and may it rest easy over you when, at last, you lie out under it.  
May it rest so lightly over you that your soul may be out from under it quickly; up and  
off and on its way to God.  
And now may the Lord bless you, and bless you kindly. Amen.

**Please can I have a God**  
(after Selima Hill)

not fossilized, hardened, stiff, unshaken,  
not contained in creeds and testimonies,  
judgments and stone tablets,  
but in the wound breaking open.

*Please can I have a God*  
who asks me to worship at the altar of mystery,  
to lay aside certainty, and curl up  
in the hollow of a great stone down by the river,  
to hear the force of it rushing past.

*Please can I have a God*  
with questions rather than answers,  
who is not Rock or Fortress or Father,  
but sashays, swerves, ripens, rages  
at the rape of the earth.

*Please can I have a God*

whose voice is the sound of a girl, long silent from abuse,  
now speaking her first word,  
who is not sweetness or light, but the fierce utterance of  
“no” in all the places where love has been extinguished.

*Please can I have a God*

the color of doubt, the shape of uncertainty,  
who sees that within me dwells a multitude,  
grief and joy, envy and generosity, rage and raucousness,  
and anoints every last part.

*Please can I have a God*

who rolls her eyes with me at platitudes and pronouncements  
and walks by my side in the early morning  
across the wet field, together bare-footed and broken-hearted,  
who is both mud and dew.

*Please can I have a God*

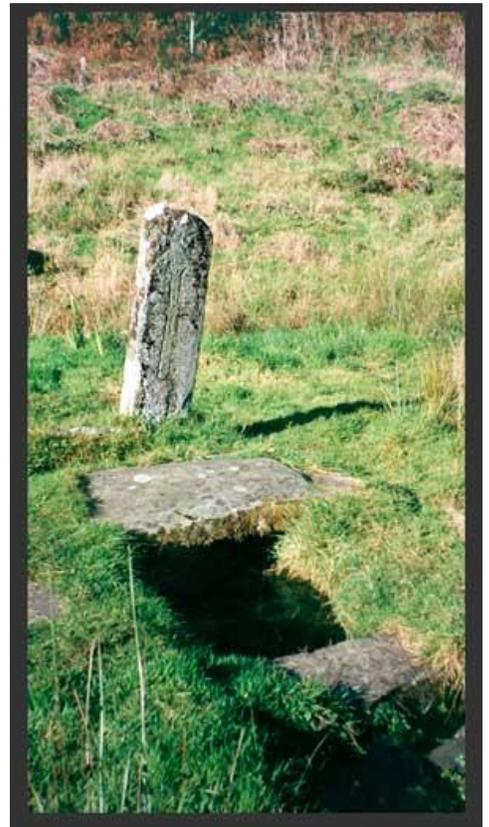
who is the vast indifference of forest and night sky,  
who is both eclipse and radiance, silence and scream,  
who is everything slow and dark and moist,  
who is not measured, controlled, but ecstatic and dancing.

*Please can I have a God*

who is not the flame, but the flickering,  
not bread, but the chewing and swallowing,  
not Lover and Beloved, but the making love,  
not the dog, but the joyful exuberance when I come home.

— Christine Valters Paintner

Near the now empty hamlet of Kilmory Oib is a stone slab that marks a very old well. The slab is weathered, however, one can see on the one side a plain cross, and on the other side, another cross surrounded by a sun, moon and birds. It is one of 3 sites associated with Saint Maelrubha (642 CE - 722 C) who was founder of the monastery of Abercrossan, well north of Iona.





### **Prayer for New Beginnings**

O God of new beginnings,  
who brings light out of night's darkness  
and fresh green out of hard winter earth,  
there is barren land between us as people  
and as nations this day,  
there are empty stretches of soul within us.  
Give us eyes to see new dawns of  
promise.  
Give us ears to hear fresh soundings of birth.

John Philip Newell

### **The Opening of Eyes**

That day I saw beneath dark clouds  
the passing light over the water  
and I heard the voice of the world speak out,  
I knew then, as I had before  
life is no passing memory of what has been  
nor the remaining pages in a great book  
waiting to be read.

It is the opening of eyes long closed.  
It is the vision of far off things  
seen for the silence they hold.  
It is the heart after years  
of secret conversing  
speaking out loud in the clear air.

It is Moses in the desert  
fallen to his knees before the lit bush.  
It is the man throwing away his shoes  
as if to enter heaven  
and finding himself astonished,  
opened at last,  
fallen in love with solid ground.

By David Whyte, From *Songs for Coming Home* (Many Rivers Press, 1984).

## **Mysteries, Yes**

Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous  
to be understood.

How grass can be nourishing in the  
mouths of the lambs.

How rivers and stones are forever  
in allegiance with gravity  
while we ourselves dream of rising.

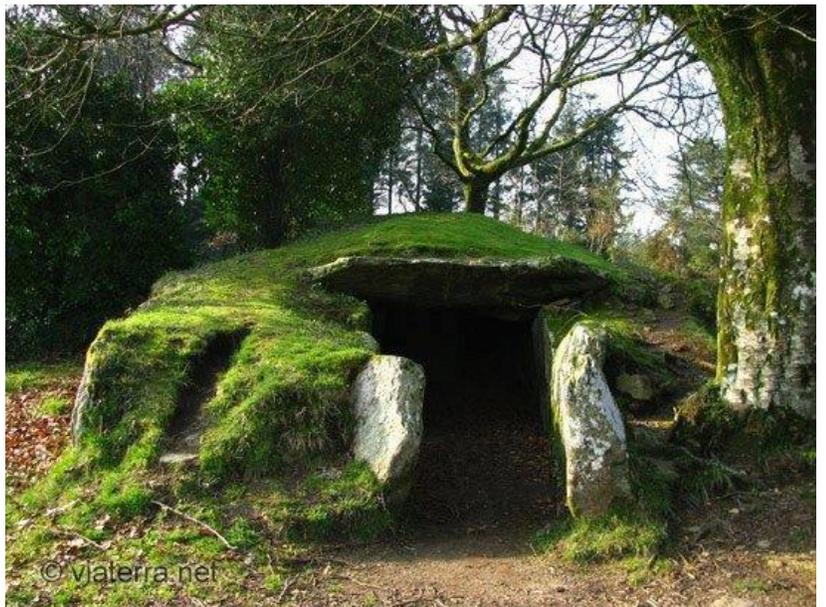
How two hands touch and the bonds will  
never be broken.

How people come, from delight or the  
scars of damage,  
to the comfort of a poem.

Let me keep my distance, always, from those  
who think they have the answers.

Let me keep company always with those who say  
"Look!" and laugh in astonishment,  
and bow their heads.

by Mary Oliver from *Evidence* (Beacon Press)



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*You will find something more in woods than in books. Trees and stones will teach you that which you can never learn from masters.*

*~ Bernard of Clairvaux*

## God's Aid

God to enfold me,  
God to surround me,  
God in my speaking,  
God in my thinking.  
God in my sleeping,  
God in my waking,  
God in my watching,  
God in my hoping.  
God in my life,  
God in my lips,  
God in my soul,  
God in my heart.  
God in my sufficing,  
God in my slumber,  
God in mine ever-living soul,  
God in mine eternity.

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