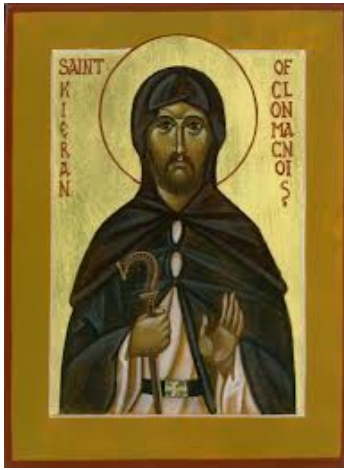


Just Too Generous

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On September 9th the Church celebrates the memory of Saint Kieran of Clonmacnois in Ireland.

Born in 512 in County Roscommon, Kieran was the grandchild of a poet and historian. He liked to think about the meaning of life, and found joy in nature's beauty. His own family lived simply, and he spent much of his childhood herding the family cattle. This gave him a special love of animals and a willingness to be compassionate with all creatures, including other people.

During these same years he was tutored at home by Justus, the same pious Christian who had baptized him, encouraging him to pray and to turn his thoughts often to the wonders of God.

When he got older, Kieran was sent to complete his education at the monastery at Clonard, under the direction of the great Saint Finnian. Here he met fellow students such as Columba, the future enlightener of Scotland. Columba said of his classmate, "He was a lamp, blazing with the light of wisdom."

Having completed his studies with Saint Finnian, Kieran left Clonard and went to a monastery in the Aran Isles. Its abbot was another saint, Enda, who had a vision that he shared with his student. Enda saw a tall tree with a massive trunk. The tree spread its sheltering branches, heavy with fragrant fruit, over the whole land of Ireland. Some of the fruit was carried off by birds to places beyond the island country itself.

Saint Enda told Kieran, "You yourself are the tree in this vision." He said that all of Ireland would find shelter under Kieran's grace, and that many, in Ireland and places past its borders, would be nourished by his prayer and fasting. He directed Kieran to go to the center of the country and to build a church on the banks of a stream.

The monastery of Clonmacnois was established by Kieran and a few other monks on the banks of the River Shannon. This famous Christian center trained priests, scholars and missionaries for a thousand years, even though Kieran died of the plague in 544, just seven months after it opened.

In the time in between Saint Enda's directive and the establishment of Clonmacnois, Kieran visited a smaller island monastery. His stay was brief, because the monks soon asked him to leave. Perhaps they were jealous of his fame, but what they said was that he was giving so much to the poor that there wasn't enough left for them. Kieran was just too generous.

What is generosity? Mother Teresa wrote that if love is to be real it must cost, must hurt, must empty us of self. Saint Basil the Great urged Christians to give "splendidly" to the poor. He said that if you're the target of many beggars you should feel grateful and honored that you don't have to make a nuisance of yourself at other people's doors, but other people come and bother you at your own!"

What would Saint Kieran say if we could ask him, "Is it possible to be just too generous?"