



Rumblings from the Bunker

THROATS, CANDLES AND BRIGID'S CROSSES!!

Let's go in reverse order and begin with St. Brigid! She is of course our secondary patron. This in effect means that she is second only to St. Patrick in our liturgical, or holy calendar. Given the time and perhaps the place in which she lived maybe it's no shock that there's plenty of folklore about her. Sometimes it's difficult to separate the real Brigid from the legend. Hopefully here in the bunker we can be straight with one another.

So from the outset let's be clear about what Brigid is not. If we make her into some sort of magical superwoman we do her a disservice, she was not that. If we make her into a gathering point for superstition, we also fail her. She was not this either. If we steep her in potents and spells we quickly lose her to the realm of the witch. No you won't find her here either. So what can we say about our special patron?

Brigid was a woman. Now I understand you will say this is to state the obvious, and whilst this is true it is a very important part of the story because given what she accomplished and her impact and influence I want to remind both myself and others she did it all as a woman. So let's say this: Brigid was not only a woman but she was a formidable and highly accomplished woman. There is so much more that could, and indeed has been said about Brigid, but here in the bunker I want to say just one more thing. It is the most important thing to say about her, and it's this: Brigid was a woman of strong faith and showed considerable courage in her determination to follow God's plan for her. I think she is under appreciated as a role model for all who struggle in their faith today. We celebrate her on February 1st, often with the making and blessing of the Brigid's Cross.

The day after St. Brigid's Day we bless candles. We bless candles some of which we tie together and use the next day, February 3rd, to bless throats. Once again the thin line between faith and superstition, between true spirituality and half baked religion, or indeed religion gone mad, presents itself. A friend of mine at home often says to me, 'religion has caused most of the wars in the world'. When you think about it, you can see where he is coming from. He has a point. Having said that I would take issue with his premise. I think in fact that the wars came not so much as a result of religion but rather when religion lost its way. It is in fact when religion is hijacked, corrupted and abused that it causes war. The candles blessed on Candlemas day, February 2nd, are fittingly blessed on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. I say fittingly because he is the Light to enlighten the Gentiles. The Light of the World. The Light no darkness can extinguish.

The candles used to bless the throats can gently remind us where the healing comes from. The healing does not come from the candle or the priest or even St. Blaise. It's interesting to note that as regular church attendance continues to take a hit there are still a few days when crowds come to the church. Indeed not only do they come in large numbers but they come on these particular days with fervor. The determination with which people pursue getting their ashes is to be seen to be believed. Another day when we have similar crowds and indeed similar devotion is for the blessing of throats. There was a time when I might have been a bit skeptical about aspects of this, but not now.

I have been thinking about this recently. Is there perhaps more to this desire to have the throat blessed than meets the eye. The door with which we swallow our food. The food that went down quickly, and smoothly. The things that were difficult to swallow. Breathing. Shallow or deep. Of course the other huge draw is healing. Healing of any kind. A growing number of people are sick in the parish. There's no doubt about it, sickness is the great leveler. It's in the sickness that we encounter Jesus the Great Healer, in fact the source of all real healing. It's not surprising there's something about healing. Maybe it's the complete knowledge that Jesus does not want us to be sick and of course we know he can make us well.

