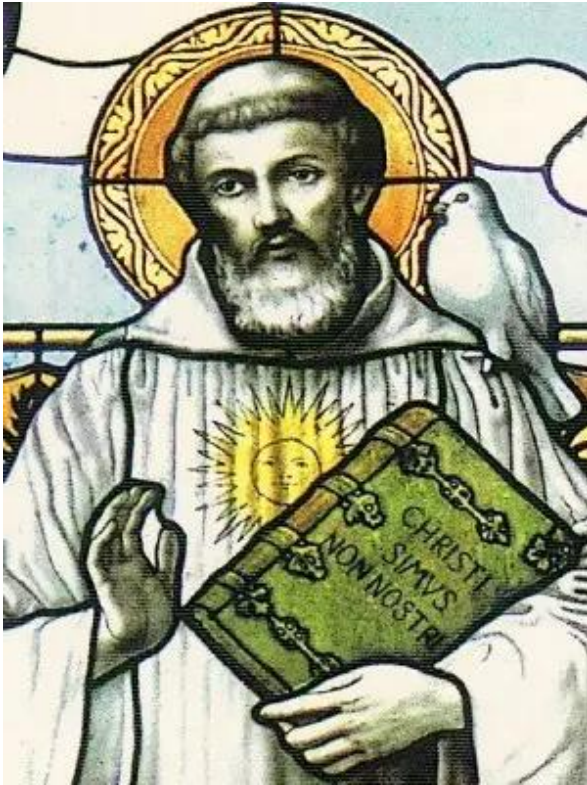


Moving towards Advent with St Columbanus

Eco contemplative liturgy, 23 November 2025, led by Deborah

Today, November 23rd, is the feast day of Irish saint Columbanus, also known as Columban, born in 543CE. His name means 'little dove', and he is not the same person as St Columba (maybe the 'big dove'?) of Iona who lived around the same time.



Columbanus was embedded in the natural world as well as being a great traveller and builder of monasteries in beautiful natural settings across Europe. His communities lived off the land (and seas and rivers) and were known as friends of the wilderness. Columbanus was deeply influenced by the Desert Fathers and loved to pray in silence, stillness and solitude. Legend has it that he would retreat to a cave which he shared with a bear he befriended. Like his contemporary St Kevin, he had close relationships with birds who would allegedly shelter in the cowl of his habit. He experienced Christ as lover, 'the fountain of those who thirst, and called on his monks to 'drink of Christ'. He was also a very angry man, in regular conflict with bishops over how he should run his monasteries, and the morality of church leaders. Monasteries of this era were more like village communities, including many people who were not professed monks, and run along very different lines to the strictly hierarchical church.

Columbanus preceded St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, by around six centuries, which perhaps tells us something about the need for continual renewal of our ecological focus. Almost nine centuries after Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis calls again for ecological conversion in his encyclical *Laudato Si*.

As we descend towards the stillness and waiting of Advent, and the living world quietens and retreats, let's reflect on our own connections and disruptions with the world around us.

Readings

See in each herb and small animal, every bird and beast, and in each man and woman, the eternal Word of God.

St. Ninian (circa 4th-5th century)

The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning... going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves.

Laudato Si (2015)

Individual contemplative time (15 minutes)

We have an opportunity for silent contemplation in the garden. If you are online, you are invited to contemplate a plant, a view from the window, or perhaps something from the natural world held in your hand.

Regathering

If you would like to, please do share any response you may have.

Concluding reading

Turn with me to the west,
where the sun falls
into the horizon's open arms
and the rising tide
of cold and dark
sends the shiver of change
through every living thing.

You will know the autumns of life,
when cherished pieces

of your world and yourself
wilt and whither,
when what has sustained you
is slipping away,
and only your faith -
that renewal
is the dancing partner of loss
- helps you trust
that the seeds of your
future wholeness
have already been planted.

James A Pearson



12th century remains of the originally 6th century 'monastic city' at Glendalough, County Wicklow, Ireland