

## St Brigid - some thoughts.

Our Scriptures for today reflect the generous, devoted spirit of Saint Brigid of Kildare. How well Job's phrases on showing loving concern for others apply to her. In pondering his life, Job muses, "I have never withheld anything the poor desired" and elsewhere, "the stranger has not lodged in the street. for I have opened my doors to the traveller." Like him, Brigid was whole-hearted in the ministry of helping people in need, convinced of the principle that "the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Born at Faughart, near Dundalk, in the middle of the 5th century, probably in the latter years of Saint Patrick's ministry in Ireland, Brigid refused several offers of marriage, in order to become a nun in the service of Christ and his church.

With seven other young women she settled for a time at the foot of Croghan Hill, but moved then to the plains of the Liffey Valley, where under a large oak tree she erected her famous convent of Cill-Dara, that is, "the church of the oak" (now Kildare). She died there half a century later, on the first of February, 525.

Brigid's strong personality and example ensured that her community served their neighbours, through various acts of mercy. Soon her small oratory at Cill-Dara (the chapel-at-the-oak) became a centre of religion and learning, and later developed into a small city. She founded two monastic institutions, one for men, and the other for women, and apparently held jurisdiction over both of them.

According to her biographer, she chose St Conleth "to govern the church along with herself." For centuries, Kildare was ruled by a double line of abbot-bishops and abbesses, the abbess of Kildare being the leader of all the convents in Ireland.

During the raids by the Norsemen in the 9th century, Brigid's relics were taken for safety to Downpatrick, where they were interred in the tomb of St Patrick and St Columcille, and since 1190 they rest in Downpatrick Cathedral. The three, Patrick, Brigid and Columcille, have for centuries been regarded as the three main patron saints of Ireland.

While her main monument is in Kildare town, she is also keenly remembered in her birthplace at Faughart, in County Louth. The old St Brigid's well adjoining the ruined church there dates from antiquity and still attracts pilgrims today.