

# THE STORY OF GLENDALOUGH

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For well over a thousand years people have been attracted to the beautiful valley of Glendalough in the Wicklow Mountains. Glendalough, the glen of two lakes, is wild, romantic and surrounded on three sides by dramatic mountains. To the south Derrybawn (white oak wood) overlooks the Lower Lake, while Lugduff (black mountain) towers over the upper lake. To the north Camaderry (pass of the oak wood) stretches the length of the glen to meet Lugduff at a high pass from which the gushing Glenealo River cascades over 1,000 feet into the valley below.

Stretching three miles along the floor of the valley are the extensive remains of an ancient monastic city comprising the ruins of seven churches, a magnificent Round Tower, a cathedral and many other ancient remains. Most visitors to Glendalough are content to simply absorb its stunning beauty, and stroll among the monastic remains. Others are curious about the history of the valley and the monastic settlement. Who were the monks who lived here for over 600 years? What was so special about their way of life, and how did it all come to an end? To understand the history of Glendalough we must first look at three great historical developments:

- The emergence of the Celtic culture,
- The rise and fall of the Roman Empire, and
- The spread of Christianity.

### **THE CELTS**

The Celts emerged as a distinct culture in Central Europe around 700 b.c. They were among the first European peoples to discover how to make iron. They had their own language, religion, culture, and art. By about 500 b.c. the Celts had spread to France, Portugal, Spain, Britain and Ireland. Some Celtic tribes also moved into the Balkans. Celtic society was composed of different classes of people e.g. royalty, aristocrats, poets, priests, common people and indeed slaves. The Celts were divided into various major groupings throughout central and western Europe. The most commonly known of these groupings were the Gauls, Belgae, Galatians, Bretons, Britons, Scots, and Gaels. Each group was subdivided into tribes, clans or tuatha, which consisted of families with a common name and ancestry. Here in Ireland we had such tuatha as the O'Neills, the O'Donnells, the O'Briens and the O'Connors. One of the Celts major weaknesses is that they never became a united society. On the contrary they constantly fought among themselves.

Between 300 b.c and 100 a.d. the Romans conquered most of the Celtic lands. The only Celts who preserved their own culture were those of Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The early Celts had no system of writing. Information about them comes from archaeological remains and also from contemporary Greek and Roman writers.

### **Observations by Roman Generals/Administrators**

#### **On the Celts**

"The whole race is madly fond of war, high spirited and quick to do battle. When they are stirred up, they assemble in their bands quite openly but without forethought, so that they are easily handled by those who desire to outwit them" (Strabo)

"A whole troop of foreigners would not be able to withstand a single Gaul if he called his wife to his assistance. Swelling her neck, gnashing her teeth, baring her breasts and brandishing her sallow arms of enormous size, she begins to strike blows mingled with kicks as if they were so many missiles sent from the string of a catapult." (Ammianus Marcellinus)

"They are wont to be moved by mere chance remarks to wordy disputes, which rapidly degenerate into unrestrained mutilation. Altogether, a truly ferocious people." (Diodorus)

## **On Ireland**

“Hibernia is situated between Britain and Spain, and is very accessible from the shores of Gaul. In size it is smaller than Britain, but larger than the islands of the Mediterranean. The soil, climate and habits of the people are similar to those of Britain. Its ports are well known to merchants.” (Agricola)

## **THE ROMANS**

The Roman Republic emerged in central Italy around 600 b.c. In 390 b.c. the Gauls burned Rome and occupied it for seven months. Between 300 b.c. and 100 a.d., the Romans expanded their Empire eastwards to Asia Minor and westwards to Britain. In so doing they completely overran the Celtic tribes of mainland Europe and Britain. The Roman system of public administration prevailed in all of the conquered lands and its impact can still be seen in many countries today. Following the death of the Emperor Constantine in 337 a.d. the Western Roman Empire became steadily weaker. In 451 a.d. Germanic tribes overran Gaul and Britain. By 476 a.d. German tribes had taken Rome.

## **CHRISTIANITY**

Christianity is the religion founded circa 30 a.d. by the itinerant preacher Jesus Christ in the Roman colony of Palestine. The Romans persecuted the Christians for many years. When, however, the Emperor Constantine became a Christian in 313 a.d., Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Thereafter, Christianity rapidly spread eastwards and westwards from Rome throughout the Empire. The Christian Church that emerged and spread throughout the Roman Empire following the conversion of the Emperor Constantine became known as the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church adopted the administrative structure and language of the Roman Empire e.g. Emperor (Pope), Senate (Curia), Regional Governor (Primate), Proconsul (Bishop) etc.. And, of course, the Church adopted the Latin language.

## **EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND**

The Irish Celts were converted to Christianity by a number of missionaries from Roman Britain, the most notable of whom was Patrick circa 432 a.d. Ireland was the first country outside the influence of the Roman Empire to be converted to Christianity.

Shortly after the arrival of Christianity in Ireland the Romans (and Christianity) had been driven out of the Western Roman Empire by hordes of invading Germanic tribes. Like the Romans before them, these Germanic tribes did not invade Ireland. The Christianity that developed in Ireland, did not adopt the Roman format or structure. It was not hierarchical, and did not have dioceses or parishes. It was essentially a monastic Church, which drew deeply on, and was inter-twined with, the Celtic Culture. From the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries a.d., there existed and flourished on an island at the western edge of the then known world, a Celtic Christian Church that was renowned for its asceticism, scholarly pursuits, artistic expression, love of nature, and a deep spirituality which drew heavily on its Celtic roots. As such it was totally unique.

Unlike monasticism on the European mainland where monks lived, worked and prayed in community, the form of monasticism that developed in Ireland was anchorite monasticism. Irish Celtic monks devoted long periods of their daily lives to solitary living and personal prayer. They developed a form of spirituality which saw God reflected in the goodness and beauty of all creation. All work was regarded as a form of prayer. The more intricate the work, the greater the prayer. This view of Christian prayer is reflected in the magnificent illuminated manuscripts, high crosses, chalices, reliquaries and other artefacts, all of which were lovingly produced over countless hours of meticulous work for the greater glory of God. In the spirituality of the early Irish monks, all of life, all of nature, pulsates with the life-force of creation, and there is nowhere where or no thing in which the creator is not. God is everywhere and in everything. They lived a life of simplicity, close to nature, with a deep personal relationship with the Creator. During this period Irish monks spread their unique expression of Christianity not only throughout Ireland but also across Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland and Northern Italy.

What were the thoughts of those monks as they sat in their cold, poorly lit cells day after day, year after year producing beautifully intricate illuminated manuscripts. One of the best insights we have into their private thoughts is the poem *Pangur Bán* that was written in Gaelic by a monk on the margin of a 9<sup>th</sup> century illuminated manuscript. The following English translation is by the Gaelic scholar Robin Flower.

I and Pangur Bán my cat,  
'Tis a like task we are at:  
Hunting mice is his delight,  
Hunting words I sit all night.

Better far than praise of men  
'Tis to sit with book and pen;  
Pangur bears me no ill will,  
He too plies his simple skill.

'Tis a merry thing to see  
At our tasks how glad are we,  
When at home we sit and find  
Entertainment to our mind.

Oftentimes a mouse will stray  
In the hero Pangur's way;  
Oftentimes my keen thought set  
Takes a meaning in its net

'Gainst the wall he sets his eye  
Full and fierce and sharp and sly;  
'Gainst the wall of knowledge I  
All my little wisdom try.

When a mouse darts from its den  
O how glad is Pangur then !  
O what gladness do I prove  
When I solve the doubts I love !

So in peace our tasks we ply,  
Pangur Bán, my cat and I;  
In our arts we find our bliss,  
I have mine and he has his.

Practice every day has made  
Pangur perfect in his trade;  
I get wisdom day and night  
Turning darkness into light.

From the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> century a unique expression of Christian belief took hold and flourished in monastic settlements large and small throughout Ireland. Among the larger of these monastic settlements were Clonmacnoise, Cashel, Ardmore and, of course, Glendalough.

Glendalough will forever be associated with St Kevin the saintly hermit who founded the monastic settlement. The story of St Kevin is recorded in a number of early manuscripts. The fullest version is

contained in a book called the *Codex Kilkenniensis*, a book on the lives of Irish saints, which is in Marsh's Library beside St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, and is commonly referred to as the Latin Life. The Annals of the Four Masters also contains many references to Glendalough.

Kevin (Caoimhín) was born to an aristocratic family in Southeast Wicklow around 520 a.d. His father was Coemlug, a descendant of a King of Leinster in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. His mother, Coemell, was the daughter of Cennandan, a chief of the house of Cormac, also of Leinster. So he was from an aristocratic Wicklow family. At the age of seven Kevin was sent to school in the monastery of Kilnamanagh (the church of the monks) near Tallaght Co. Dublin where he studied firstly under St Petroc, a learned monk from Cornwall, and then under his uncle, St Eoghan. Kevin devoted himself to his studies and decided to adopt the life of a monk. Having been ordained to the priesthood by a bishop named Ligidus, Kevin was sent out with some other young monks to found a new monastery. They initially settled in a place called Cluainduach, the location of which has never been identified. Here, it is recorded, they spent some time "gathering servants for Christ". After some time in Cluainduach he and his companions set off again in search of a better site for their monastery. Kevin wanted a location that would enable him not only to set up a monastery but also to establish a hermitage. They eventually settled in Glendalough. We do not know for certain which route they followed to Glendalough, but tradition has it that they came across the Wicklow Gap. To this day there is a track across the Wicklow Gap called the Saints Road. Glendalough was at that time a beautiful, wild and isolated place. According to the records, Kevin and his companions, on arrival in Glendalough set about establishing a monastic settlement in the lower part of the valley where two clear rivers flow together. Even to-day this location can be identified as the place where the Glenealo and Glendassen rivers meet. Once the settlement was established, Kevin moved to a more remote part of the valley in search of a place to locate a hermitage for himself. He selected an isolated site on a small rocky ledge, created by an ancient landslide, at the foot of a steep cliff on the south shore of the Upper Lake. Here Kevin built his hermitage, Teampall na Scellig (the church of the rock), which would at that time most likely have consisted of a small timber cell, an oratory and a vegetable garden.

It was here that one of the best known incidents in Kevin's life is reputed to have occurred. The name Kevin means fair-begotten and his good looks apparently attracted a young lady of outstanding beauty whose various efforts to seduce him were such that he once removed his clothes and rolled naked in a bed of nettles to cool his passion. The name Kathleen for the fair maiden is a later addition, as is the version of the story recounted in the popular song the Glendalough Saint.

In Glendalough lived an auld saint  
Renowned for his learning and piety  
His customs were curious and quaint  
And he looked upon girls with disparity.

He was fond of reading a book  
When he could get one to his wishes  
He was fond of casting his hook  
In among the auld fishes

One evening he landed a trout  
He landed a fine big trout sir  
When young Kathleen from over the way  
Came to see what the auld monk was about sir

Ah get out of me way said the saint  
For I am a man of great piety  
And me good manners I wouldn't taint  
By mixing with female society  
But young Kathleen she wouldn't give in  
And when he got back to his rockery

He found she was seated therein  
A polishing up his auld crockery

Well he gave the poor craytur a shake  
And I wish that the peelers had got him  
For she fell over into the lake  
And be jaypers she sank to the bottom.

The present remains on Teampall na Skellig, a small stone church 25ft x 14ft, a raised garden and the excavated foundations of some primitive cells, are of a later date. The earliest of these remains i.e. part of the small church, dates possibly from the late seventh century, about 80 years after Kevin's death.

Nearby in the sheer cliff face about 30 ft above the lake is a small man-made cave. The cave runs some six feet into the rock, its width varying from 2ft to 4ft and its height up to 2ft 9 inches. The origin of the cave is not known, but the most plausible explanation is that it was created by Bronze Age miners in search of ore, which existed in some abundance throughout the valley. It is recorded that Kevin regularly slept in this cave as a form of mortification. And so the cave became known, and is still known, as St Kevin's Bed. It should be noted that Teampall na Skellig and St Kevin's Bed can now be accessed only with great difficulty to life and limb since the boats were withdrawn from the lake. They are best seen from the viewing point on the Miners Road on the north side of the Upper Lake. While Kevin spent periods of time alone in his hermitage at Teampall na Skellig, he also spent a great deal of time with his fellow monks. As his reputation for sanctity and learning spread, more and more people came to Glendalough until eventually it developed into a monastic city.

On the shore of the Upper Lake, not far from Teampall na Skellig is a delightful church called Reefert (royal burial place) in a very picturesque setting, surrounded by ancient burials. It is said that Reefert was built by the local royal family, the O'Tooles, as a burial place for their nobility. Its location was chosen because of its proximity to Teampall na Skellig.

The predominant stone in Glendalough is mica-schist, which is not particularly suited to carving. While it is clear that many of the slabstones at Reefert were originally adorned with carvings, almost all have been eroded. However, on close examination some carvings are still discernible. A finely carved intricate Celtic motif can be discerned on a stone cross, located near the southeast corner of the church. There is an eighteenth century drawing of an inscribed slabstone at Reefert with the inscription "Ór do Carpre Mac Cathuill" , a prayer for Carpre the son of Cathail, an anchorite monk at Glendalough whose death is recorded in 1013 in the Annals of the Four Masters. Another stone from Reefert on which carving survives is the Breasal Slab, which was moved to the shelter of St Kevin's Church in 1875. It has an incised cross carving and written on it are the words "Ór do Breasal" a prayer for Breasal, with the Greek letters alpha and omega and the Christ monogram IHS XRS.

On a hill above Reefert, with majestic views overlooking the Upper Lake is the remains of a stone beehive hut. Tradition has it that this was Kevin's cell when he was not at his hermitage. On a visit to this location some years ago with a group of Canadians, one of the group asked me how old the cell was. When I told him that St Kevin was here in the 6<sup>th</sup> century a.d. he replied "*You must hand it to them, they could pick the sites even then.*"

If you follow the track that rises up above St Kevin's Cell you will pass a small modern sculpture depicting the story of St Kevin and the bird that nested in his hand. This track joins a forest road rising initially and then falling down to meet the beautiful Lugduff Brook with its magnificent Poulanass waterfall. The track alongside the waterfall returns to the shore of the Upper Lake. Pause here for a moment and look westward over the lake to the mountains beyond. It is one of the most majestic views in all of Ireland.

In the middle of the large green area close to the shore of the Upper Lake are the remains of a stone Celtic ring fort. It is the oldest man-made structure in the valley, predating all of the monastic remains. Running

in a line across this green area are four large ancient crosses. These are most likely sanctuary crosses marking the boundary of the monastic settlement at the Upper Lake.

During and after Kevin's lifetime, large numbers of followers were attracted to Glendalough, and the monastic settlement spread eastwards along the valley. A settlement of this size would have engaged the services of a large number of lay workers and their families who would have been an integral part of the community. Monastic Glendalough gained renown as a place of prayer, scholarship and industrious pursuits.

Kevin's death is described in the Latin Life but without a date. It is however given in the Annals of Ulster as 618 a.d. It does not record where in Glendalough his death occurred, but it was not at the hermitage, as he sent a group of monks there to say a prayer for him. Kevin was succeeded as abbot by his nephew, Molibba.

As we move down the valley, past the lower lake, the first remains encountered is St Mary's Church. St Mary's was a nunnery and the present ruin stands on the site of an earlier church which existed in Kevin's time. The term Our Lady to describe the mother of Jesus was not used in the Celtic Church. The term used was Naomh Mhuire - St Mary. The most notable feature at St Mary's is the massive west doorway which held Sir Walter Scott spellbound when he visited Glendalough in 1825. Carved on the underside of the lintel stone of the doorway is an unusual saltire cross. It is quite probably a sanctuary cross, giving refuge to all who entered. Oral tradition has it that St Mary's is where Kevin died and where he is buried.

Moving further east we encounter the dramatic ruins of the central Monastic settlement which is located on the site of the original monastery established by Kevin and his companions on their arrival from Cluainduach i.e. between where the two clear rivers flow together. The main entrance to the monastic compound was through a gatehouse, the ruined remnant of which stands opposite the bridge beside the Glendalough hotel. The approach to the gatehouse, before the bridge was built in the nineteenth century, was across stepping stones, which can still be seen in the river beneath the bridge. This gatehouse is the only remaining gateway to a Celtic monastery. An old line drawing by Rev Dr Wynne around 1770 shows it with a pitched stone roof from which a small round tower, similar to St Kevin's Church, which we will come to shortly, appears to rise. Immediately inside the gatehouse is a massive mica-schist stone with a large cross incised on it. This cross most probably marks the point of sanctuary.

Towering over this area of the monastic settlement is a round tower, 110ft high and one of the finest examples of a round tower in Ireland. Round towers are unique to the Celtic church. They were built as bell-towers, as their Gaelic name Cloigteach indicates. They were also watchtowers and refuges. This latter use is highlighted by the fact that the doorway to the round tower in Glendalough, like almost all such towers, is located some 12 ft above ground level. Modern experts date the Glendalough round tower to between 830 and 997 a.d.

Close to the round tower are the ruins of the Cathedral, the largest building in Glendalough. The Cathedral would have been the location for major liturgical ceremonies. Its exact construction date is not known but it is possibly contemporary with the round tower. The Annals record that it was burnt in 832, destroyed in 835, plundered in 886 and 977 and destroyed by fire in 1095 and 1163. So the present structure is probably the outcome of many re-buildings, and given its history it is amazing how much of it remains. Inside, a number of ancient grave-slabs are mounted on the north wall. Some of these contain interesting carvings and inscriptions. (These slabs have recently been removed to an indoor location to preserve the inscriptions). The construction of the Cathedral contains a number of interesting features. It is clear that the large cut stone slabs along the base of the walls are taken from a previous building and reused. There are a number of large D-shaped stones randomly inserted in the walls which clearly had another prior function. It has been suggested that perhaps they were supports for the arched windows during construction, which were removed when the window arches solidified. There is, curiously, a bullaun stone inserted in the wall at the north-east corner of the chancel. All of this would indicate that every available stone was used in the construction of the Cathedral.

Near to the southwest corner of the Cathedral is the old monastery graveyard, at the east end of which is a plain un-pierced Celtic Cross, 11ft high and known as St. Kevin's Cross. Its style marks an early transition from the pagan Celtic pillar stone to the Christian Celtic Cross. There is an old custom that if an unattached lady can stretch her arms around this cross and touch her fingers, she will be married within a year. When this tale is told to visitors there is usually a rush of unattached ladies to try their luck. I can recall one lady, however, who showed a marked reticence to participate and when I asked her why, she replied, "*I'm afraid I might succeed.*"

Close to St Kevin's Cross is the Priests House, so called because during the nineteenth century it was reserved as a burial place for local priests. The building, which is too small to be a church, may originally have been a repository for sacred vessels and relics. The highly ornate archway on the eastern wall indicates that it was a building of some importance.

And now we come to the beautiful St Kevin's Church with its delightful stone roof from which a small round tower rises. Because of the chimney-like appearance of the tower the church is often given the rather silly name, St Kevin's Kitchen. It is probably one of the most photographed of the Celtic churches. It has also been painted by countless artists. Close by are the remains of St Ciaran's church.

Across the valley, beside the roadway to Laragh village is another ruined church, Holy Trinity, which had a round tower similar to St Kevin's that was blown down in a storm in 1818.

It is clear from the accounts of the many disasters that befell Glendalough that there were other churches in the valley, the remains of which are no longer visible but which may yet be located by excavation.

After Kevin's death circa 618 a.d. Glendalough became a typical large Celtic monastery, built on the fame of its founder and ruled by an abbot. According to the Latin Life, Kevin was given the entire valley by the local chieftain Dimma. From the time of its foundation, and for six hundred years up to the Norman invasion in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Glendalough was renowned as one of the great Irish centres of religion and learning. It was, however, burned and plundered many times. The only surviving manuscripts from Glendalough are the Drummond Missal in the Pierpoint Morgan Library in New York, and two pages from a Latin text-book in the British Museum. The Annals of the Four Masters contain many references to Glendalough, but mainly to dates of the death of abbots and of the disasters that befell the monastery. The first recorded destruction of Glendalough was by fire in 770. Fire was an ever-present hazard with so many timber structures around. Between 770 and 1176 there are nineteen recorded instances of burning, plundering or destruction at Glendalough. And then in 1177 it is recorded that "*an astonishing flood swept through the valley sweeping all before it.*" Given this litany of disasters it is amazing that so much of the monastic city remains today. Most of the buildings, apart from the churches, would have been built of timber, and it is these and the manuscripts which would have been destroyed during these times.

In 1153 Glendalough produced a second towering figure whose historical importance would equal and perhaps surpass that of Kevin; Laurence O'Toole.

Laurence O'Toole (Lorcan O Tuathail) was born in 1127, reputedly near Castledermot in Co. Kildare, the son of a Gaelic chieftain. His mother was an O'Byrne from another of the ruling families of Co Wicklow. At the age of ten he was handed over as a hostage to Dermot MacMurrough, King of Leinster, at Ferns. This was a common practice by which a greater king secured the loyalty of a lesser one. Laurence was badly treated by MacMurrough, which laid the foundation for lifelong hostility between the two men. After strong protests from Laurence's father about his treatment of the boy, MacMurrough agreed to hand him over to the custody of the Abbot of Glendalough.

Laurence became attracted to the life of the monks in Glendalough, and when his father came to discuss his future with the Abbot, Laurence declared his intention to enter religious life. Having joined the monastic community in Glendalough, Laurence gained a reputation as a devout and learned scholar.

Such was the regard in which he was held that in 1153, at the youthful age of 26, he was appointed Abbot of Glendalough. His regime as Abbot is said to have been marked by great virtue, learning, piety, and strict adherence to the monastic rules.

Laurence's tenure as Abbot at Glendalough coincided with the reform of the Celtic Church and adoption by that church of the rites and structure of the Roman Catholic Church. From the late 9<sup>th</sup> century a movement had developed to bring about reform within the Celtic church. In the first half of the twelfth century a determined move was made, led by St Malachy Abbot of Armagh, to achieve full communion with the See of Rome. These reforms were the subject of a number of synods of the Celtic Church, culminating with a National Synod at Kells in 1152.

At the Synod of Kells the diocesan structure of the Irish Church, as we know it today, was established and communion with Rome was agreed. The diplomatic skills of the Papal Legate, Cardinal Paparo, were most effectively demonstrated when he resolved the thorny problem of the primacy of the Irish Church by decreeing that the Archbishop of Dublin would be Primate of Ireland, while the Archbishop of Armagh would be Primate of All Ireland. The distinction between the two primacies has never been clarified.

The reform process was now complete. The Celtic Church accepted the hierarchical structure and liturgical rites of the Roman Catholic Church, and the primacy of Rome. Dioceses and parishes were established and the authority of Bishops recognised. The Celtic monasteries adopted the Rule of St Augustine in accordance with Papal decree. Thus ended over 600 years of the Celtic Church in Ireland, the age of saints and scholars. During the Dark Ages Irish monks had not only kept the light of Christianity alive in Ireland but had reached out to Britain and across Central Europe to Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland and even Northern Italy. They brought with them their unique expression of the Christian message; prayer, frugal living, a love of learning, and a deep appreciation of nature as the creation of God.

The strength of the Celtic Church lay in its unique blending of Christianity and the Celtic culture, which created a profound and truly beautiful expression of Christian spirituality, that, even in the troubled times of today, many people are re-discovering, and drawing upon, to give meaning to their Christian beliefs. Its main weakness, and ultimate downfall, was the lack of cohesive organisation and structure, which gave rise to continuous strife and bickering.

There was a great deal of rebuilding at Glendalough at the time of the reforms and much of it has been attributed to Laurence, who fully embraced the need for reform and communion with Rome. For example, the Celtic Churches were single chamber with the priest close to the people. As part of the reforms, the east walls of the churches in Glendalough were demolished and the churches extended to create a chancel or sanctuary that separated the clergy from the people. It is clearly visible on examination that in many of the churches at Glendalough the chancels are later additions. It is an ironic twist of history that the post Vatican II church has come full circle with the removal of chancels and the repositioning of the altar among the congregation.

In 1162 following the death of Gregory, the first Archbishop of Dublin, Laurence was unanimously selected to be his successor. Laurence had no desire to leave Glendalough and declined the appointment. The electors however were adamant and refused to elect anyone else. Laurence, recognising their insistence, and perhaps the will of God, finally accepted the onerous appointment.

The election of Laurence O'Toole as Archbishop of Dublin cannot have pleased the King of Leinster, Dermot MacMurrough, who was by now his brother-in-law. Dermot was a dissolute character who in 1153 had seduced the wife of O'Rourke, Prince of Breffny. For this action O'Rourke persecuted him with undying hostility, till he drove him from Ireland to seek shelter in the Court of Henry II. There he plotted to return to Ireland and re-gain the kingship of Leinster with the support of Henry and his Norman allies.

Laurence O'Toole was a diligent pastor of his diocese. As in Glendalough, he called on the Canons Regular of St Augustine to assist in the administration of the Diocese. The ruins that can be clearly seen close the

south side of Christchurch Cathedral in Dublin are those of the monastery belonging to the Augustinian Canons brought in by Laurence. He was a person of strong beliefs and a stern reprover of vice and wrongdoing. He energetically and courageously opposed MacMurrough and the invading Anglo-Normans.

Then, when Dublin fell into their hands on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1170, he used all the influence of his name, his position, and his strength of character, to gain the best terms possible for his vanquished flock. With the sudden death of Dermot MacMurrough on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1171, Dublin was to become the seat of English power in Ireland for the next 750 years.

In 1179 Laurence led a delegation of two archbishops and three bishops from the Irish Church to the Third Lateran Council in Rome. Laurence's intellectual capacity and personal integrity became evident at the Council and, before returning home, Pope Alexander III appointed him Papal Legate in Ireland. Laurence had come a very long way indeed from the young devout Celtic monk in Glendalough.

Upon his return to Dublin, Laurence was so troubled by the miseries of the people, which he saw all around, that he determined to go and plead directly with Henry II. He crossed to England, but Henry had gone to Normandy. Despite the onset of winter, the Archbishop, though suffering from exhaustion, decided to follow him. He travelled as far as the Augustinian Abbey of Eu in Normandy where the brethren of the abbey, observing that he was seriously ill, took him into their care.

Laurence O'Toole, son of a Gaelic chieftain; devout monk and learned Abbot of the Celtic Church; distinguished Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church; Papal Legate, and courageous defender of his flock, passed from this earth on November 14<sup>th</sup> 1180. He was 53 years of age. His body was entombed with great ceremony in the Abbey of the Augustinian canons in Eu. His heart was brought back to Dublin by his distraught companions and is venerated to this day in a reliquary at his cathedral of Holy Trinity (Christchurch).

Laurence O'Toole's esteem lives on in the memory of the Diocese of Dublin, and justly so, for he was an honour to it. He was pious, learned, and devout. He was greatly concerned for the wellbeing of his flock, a concern that ultimately led to his untimely death. He was a vital and respected link between the Celtic Church and the newly formed Irish Catholic Church. He was devoted to the work of preaching and living Christ's message, as he understood it. He died as he lived, doing that work.

In 1225, Laurence O'Toole was canonised by Pope Honorius III, becoming the first of only two Irish persons to be canonised by the Roman Catholic Church.

It was Laurence who in 1160 organised the arrival of Augustinian Canons in Glendalough to oversee the adoption by the monks of the rule of Saint Augustine. They set up an Augustinian monastery on the riverbank about a mile east of the monastic city. Here, in a place known as Gleann Lorcaín, one can see the beautiful remains of St Saviour's Priory, which still has its surrounding cashel intact. On the way to St Saviour's, along the green road, one passes St Kevin's Well, now dry but which still attracts many visitors convinced of its healing powers.

The arrival of the Augustinians in 1160 marks the end of 600 years of Celtic monasticism in Glendalough. It began with Kevin, the simple hermit and his band of followers and it ended with Laurence O'Toole, Celtic monk, learned Abbot, Archbishop of Dublin, Papal Legate and Ireland's first canonised saint.

Following Laurence's death, Henry intervened with the Pope to have his own nominee appointed Archbishop of Dublin. From then until the Reformation every Archbishop of Dublin was appointed on the nomination of the English monarch. Dublin became the most anglicised of the Irish dioceses.

Although Celtic monasticism had ended, the Irish still retained an attraction to the monastic life. Orders like the Cistercians, Dominicans, Augustinians and particularly the Franciscans, whose way of life came closest to that of the Celtic monks, flourished in Ireland until the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century

and the introduction of the penal laws. When the Catholic Church in Ireland re-emerged following Catholic emancipation in 1829 it took a particularly legalistic and triumphant form becoming almost more Roman than the Romans. In recent years, however, there has been a considerable resurgence of interest in Celtic spirituality. Many Catholics who have become disillusioned by recent scandals but who wish to retain their faith have reached back to the spirituality of the early Christian church in Ireland to renew their faith.

So do take the time to visit Glendalough. You can go by car or take the St Kevin's Bus, which leaves every morning from St Stephen's Green in Dublin and returns in the evening. Start at the Upper Lake. Walk up the Miners' Road to the viewing point for Teampaill na Skellig and St Kevin's Bed. (If you continue to walk along this road for 2 miles you will come to an abandoned mine which operated up to the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century).

Next, go to the far side of the Upper Lake to visit Reefert and St Kevin's Cell.

From here walk down the valley past the Lower Lake via the new wooden pathway and call into St Mary's Church. From here go to the Hotel for some refreshment and a rest. After that visit the central section containing the Round Tower, the Cathedral and St Kevin's Church.

Then on down the green road past St Kevin's Well, directly opposite which, on the other side of the valley, you can see Holy Trinity Church. From St Kevin's Well you continue down the green road to St Saviour's Augustinian Priory, after which you can either continue along the green road to Laragh Village or back to the Hotel.