

14<sup>th</sup> June 2021

## Coracle

**“They are ill discoverers that think there is no land,  
When they can see nothing but sea.”**

*Francis Bacon, Advancement of learning (1605)*

I mentioned yesterday that June 9<sup>th</sup> saw the fifteen hundredth anniversary of the birth of St Columba. I've been using a new book to guide my prayers around this important anniversary. It's called "A Novena to Saint Columba", and, with prayers based on Celtic traditions as well as on writings attributed to St Columba himself, it's been produced by Fr Ross SJ Crichton, a priest of the RC Diocese of Argyll and the Isles.

One section touches on the treacherous journey Columba made from Ireland to Scotland. During the Saint's lifetime, sea voyages were the most common means of travel. But many vessels were barely suitable for work inshore far less on a long journey. The most common was the coracle, a small, rounded, lightweight boat with a framework of split and interwoven willow rods tied with willow bark, covered with a skin from a horse or bullock, and smeared with a layer of tar to waterproof it. A coracle was small, frail and held no more than two people. It was in vessels such as these that St Columba and his men crossed to Scotland.

Legend has it that he stopped at various islands between Ireland and Scotland, each time climbing to the highest point to look back home. If he could see Ireland, he wasn't far enough away, so they sailed on. When, at last, the coracles landed on a pebbled beach of the Isle of Iona, off the south-west tip of the Island of Mull, he climbed the hill above the bay and looked back once again. No longer able to see his native shore, he decided that this was the place on which he was to settle. That spot is now called "St Columba's Bay" or "The Bay of the Coracle".

We also have journeys to take, to leave things behind or find new beginnings. Sometimes the travelling is hard, or the boat that carries us is frail. But, like St Columba, we learn to trust the journey, and, when the time is right, we will know that we are in the place where we were meant to be.

Today, with Columba, we trust our coracle, trust our companions, trust our decisions on where to settle, trust our purpose, trust our God.

### **A prayer for today**

*Lord, calm the storms in my life, and bring me safely home. Amen*