



## **A Pilgrimage remembering Saint Columban.**

On October 24 we (Columban Sisters in Myanmar) celebrated the 1400 anniversary of the death of St. Columban. As we prepared for our celebration it became clear to us that many of Columban's values and spiritual practices have meaning in all religions and cultures.

So we decided to invite our interfaith friends- Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus to join us pilgrimage celebrating Columban .We were fifty people in all- Columban Sisters, Neil Magill Columban Father, members of our Catholic community and our interfaith friends.

During the pilgrimage we reflected on the values and practices of St. Columban that can speak to all times, cultures and religious traditions.

We had seven sacred pauses, seven moments of reflection and practice as we journeyed.

### **Seven Reflection Pauses.**

#### **1. Setting out on pilgrimage.**



*Kathleen welcomed us to a pilgrimage -a ritual journey with a holy purpose. "Every step along the way has meaning. A pilgrimage is not a vacation; it is a journey during which significant change happens. New insights are given. Deeper understanding is attained. New and old places in the heart are visited. Blessings are received and healing takes place."*



*On return from the pilgrimage, life is seen with different eyes. Nothing will ever be quite the same again.*

*Theresa sent us forth with a blessing in song- 'peace, love, joy be before us, behind us and under our feet.'*



*Bishop Paul Grawng who accompanied us prayed for our journey.*



*Spiritual Practice: I set out as a pilgrim.*

*(At each stage of our journey we engaged together in a spiritual practice.)*



*We set out for the riverside from where we travelled by boat down the Irrawaddy river, remembering Columban's many boat journeys. We travelled to Sagaying- a nearby town which is home to many Buddhist monasteries, nunneries and Buddhist hermits living in the hills.*

## **2. Columban the exile.**

*Susanna led us in a reflection on Columban leaving his home and all that was familiar and comfortable in order to step into the unknown and become a pilgrim for Christ.*

*Ma U Nanya a Buddhist nun took up this theme reflecting on non-attachment and letting go of greed and hatred in the Buddhist tradition.*

*Spiritual practice: As we crossed the plank onto the boat-we did so with awareness of the letting –go that we need to practice in our own lives.*







### 3. Columban arriving in a new place and embracing a new land and culture.

*Enda led this reflection – ‘how awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.’*

*Neil Macgill spoke about Columban’s commitment to justice even when it meant challenging kings and rulers.*

*U Mandalar a Buddhist monk reflected on awareness of being in the present moment, openness to whatever comes and always being willing to learn, to be a beginner.*

*Spiritual Practice: Openness to new insights, perceptions etc. - beginners mind.*







4. **Columban founded many monasteries in Europe.**

*Mary Dillon shared about her pilgrimage in Europe and the journeys of Columban. She spoke about the importance of walking in the scriptures and in the life of Columban.*

*“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of one who brings good news.”*

*U Verasami spoke about walking as a spiritual practice.*





**5. Columban the lover of Nature.**

*Cristita spoke on this theme. We are on a pilgrimage on this holy land, planet earth. We give thanks for clean water, for the Sun that gives light and heat, for the moon and the Stars that light our way in the dark.*

*Spiritual Practice: Let us walk gently and reverently on the earth our common home.*



*Go KyawKhain spoke about practical ways to care for the earth as we try to live simple lives.*





## 6. Columban the Hermit



*For this we visited a small monastery where a Buddhist monk lives as a hermit. When Theresa and Kathleen went to arrange for the pilgrimage he welcomed us but asked that his silence and solitude be respected and no requested no picture taking.*

*Mary Ita shared here on Columban the hermit and U Khaw San shared on the hermit experience of the Prophet Mohammed.*

*Then the hermit monk welcomed us to his place and said he was so happy that we were from so many different faiths. He spoke of the importance of common ground.*

*Our spiritual practices here was taking time for silence and solitude. Where in our lives is the cave to which we can regularly and constantly return?*

## 7. Columban the man of prayer.



Kathleen introduced this and then Fr. Marco Tin Win and Daw Dhamma Theingyi led us into a period of quiet meditation.

Fr. Mark who is in charge of interfaith dialogue in Mandalay Archdiocese



was the interpreter for the entire pilgrimage.



*After this we went down the hill to share food together in restaurant near the Buddhist nuns. Then we went to their nunnery for a short visit where Theresa showed a power-point we had prepared on St. Columban. U Aye shared a Hindu response to the pilgrimage. The nuns shared refreshments with us and we ended as we began singing- 'peace, joy love be before us behind us and under our feet.' It was an experience for all of us of the universal appeal of Columban.*

