

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

February 1, 2010 at 7:27am

Feb. 1, Brigit, Holy Woman

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NCR Today

"Brigit was remade in Christian form and occupies a space between myth and history, pagan and Christian, oral and written, vernacular and Latin, folkloric and ecclesiastical. She may be contextualised either way, to be purely a Celtic goddess or purely a Christian saint. Yet both these versions of her are incomplete, mutilations of the complex and multifaceted reality. Thus, Ó Catháin's suggestion she be designated the 'Holy Woman' is an excellent one since, whether pagan or Christian, Brigit is always distinguished by her holiness and her femaleness."

--"Brigit: Goddess, Saint, 'Holy Woman', and Bone of Contention", by Carole Cusack, Associate Professor of Studies in Religion at The University of Sydney

Cusack is referring to Séamas Ó Catháin, Professor of Folklore at University College, Dublin, who brought "folkloric research into Brigit" "up to date in a most impressive fashion in the 1990s". In one example, "The Festival of Brigit the Holy Woman", he describes the agricultural customs tied to Imbolc and Brigit's feast day.

The use of the *Brat Br'de* is particularly fascinating. A piece of cloth is tied to a bush the night before Brigit's feast, so she may touch it as she passes by. After that, it is brought inside and used in many ways: to aid in handling livestock, to be sewn into the clothing of young girls to protect them, etc.

Ó Catháin's description of the Br'deog procession is also interesting. Young people, up to age twenty, boys dressed as girls and vice versa, bearing an image of Brigit, sometimes made on a churn dash so it could stand up when placed on the ground, would go from house to house. They would sing, when invited into a house, and say prayers to St. Brigit for those in the house. They would then be given bread and butter, or, in recent times, money. (The symbolism of this is explained and footnoted beginning on p.

26/256.)

When Christianity came to Ireland, Brigit, the beloved goddess of healing, poetry, crafts, etc., associated with cattle, sheep, butter, milk, ale, bears, boars, fecundity, hospitality, keening, whistling, the hearth, wells, etc., became St. Brigit, a powerful abbess who outranked all the bishops of Ireland, but who retained her pagan attributes and powers and her place in Irish hearts and memories.

When Irishmen were sent as slaves to the Caribbean, they took Brigit with them, and in Haiti she became Mamam Brigitte, the only Loa with blonde hair and green eyes.

To see a "St. Brigid Icon" with red hair and freckles by Br. Kenneth, O.P.C., click here.

For information about Brigit's Cross, click here.

To learn how to make a Brigit's Cross, click here.

Whatever we think of the historicity of St. Brigit of Kildare, there must be countless (except by God) Bridgets, Brides, Brides, Biddys, Brighids, Brigids, Brigits, Brideys, etc., in heaven. Happy feast day to them all and to all their descendants!

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