

## SAINT MODOMNOC OF OSSORY



**Regarding St. Modomnoc's early life**, we have very little information. We know he was born near the end of the 5th century or early 6th century, somewhere in modern-day Ulster. We know that he was of the royal O'Neill Clan, and thus a descendent of Niall of the Nine Hostages (who led the raids that abducted St. Patrick from Britain). His name may actually have been Dominic, as the medieval Irish often placed "mo" in front of the names of Irish saints (it translates to "my", "little", or "dear", as in "Dear Dominic". Much of our information regarding St. Modomnoc comes from *The Life of Saint David*, but he is also mentioned in *The Martyrology of Oengus* and *The Martyrology of Donegal*.

### **Modomnoc became a priest and left Ireland to be educated at a monastery in Wales.**

Menevia Monastery was run by St. David of Wales, a very holy man who is to Wales as St. Patrick is to Ireland. Upon being accepted into the monastery, St. David gave him the duty of beekeeper. Modomnoc had never seen a bee before. But he accepted this duty joyfully. He built beehives out of straw in a suitable place in the garden, planting flowers he knew the bees would love best. He spoke to them as he worked, and the bees would swarm around Modomnoc's head, but he was never stung once. His beehives produce so much honey that he needed helpers to deliver it to the monastery.

Another interesting story regarding St. Modomnoc comes from *The Life of Saint David*, where Modomnoc was tasked with excavating a road leading to the monastery with his fellow monks. He asked one of the monks: "Why dost thou work so lazily and so slowly?" The monk, overcome with rage, lifted up his axe to kill him. St David saw this from a distance, and so he raised his hands towards them, made the sign of the cross, and hand which held the axe withered before it could strike, saving Modomnoc's life.

**After his education ended, it was time to sail back to Ireland.** Modomnoc was ready to begin his priestly ministry, and thanked St. David, his priestly brothers, and of course, his bees. There was one problem -- the bees followed Modomnoc, even across the sea! Twice Modomnoc sailed back to Wales to return the bees, scolding the little creatures for abandoning his fellow monks. After the second time, St. David gave the bees to Modomnoc, and charged him with taking care of them in Ireland. As such, just as St. Patrick is attributed with driving all the snakes from Ireland, St. Modomnoc is attributed with introducing bees to Ireland.

**Upon returning to Ireland,** Modomnoc built a church in Bremore in modern day County Dublin. There he established the bees in a beautiful garden. To this day, it is called The Church of the Beekeeper. Modomnoc eventually settled in the Kingdom of Ossory, now modern-day County Kilkenny, where he became bishop. Modomnoc died sometime around 550 AD, living as a hermit near Tybroughney, but not before establishing a monastery there, the ruins of which still exist today and presumably is where he is buried.

**St. Modomnoc's feast day is tomorrow, February 13.** Fittingly, he is the patron saint of bees. Since it is the eve of his feast, and due to his patronage, I thought it appropriate that I bring a few bottles of mead, which is of course made from honey. We can drink it to celebrate and honor St. Modomnoc after the meeting.

**What does St. Modomnoc teach us?** Firstly, Modomnoc certainly teaches us the virtues of humility and obedience. As there were no bees in Ireland, he could have protested that he was not equipped with the skills to be the beekeeper of the monastery as St. David commanded him to be. Yet he accepted this task with joy, trusting in God. He also teaches us something very fundamental, the second commandment God ever gave humanity, upon their creation: "Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, and all the living things that crawl upon the earth." We are each called to be stewards of God's creation. Think of what small pieces of the natural world God has given you to take care of: your garden, your pets, your lawn. St. Modomnoc was given the beehives of the monastery, and he loved those bees with pure Christian charity. Tending to the parts of nature that God has granted us dominion over with the love and care that St. Modomnoc gave his bees may not be grand or majestic in the way the world expects, but it is a "Little Way", as St. Therese of Lisieux famously calls it, for us to grow in holiness.

The Eastern Rite of the Catholic Church has a prayer to St. Modomnoc, called the Kontakion of St. Modomnoc, which I will end with here:

*Retiring from the company of men,  
thou didst serve God in solitude, O Father Modomnock,  
and thy Father, seeing thy virtue in secret,  
rewarded thee openly.  
Therefore we glorify thy name  
and praise and bless thy righteous memory.*