

HOLY MOUNTAIN

Croagh Patrick (The Reek) is the holiest mountain in Ireland. Legend says St. Patrick spent 40 days there, battling the devil and winning a blessing for Ireland from God. While in Ireland on sabbatical, I waited for the perfect time and good weather to climb The Reek. Neither happened. It was the rainiest summer in a decade, and my sabbatical was coming to an end. Circumstances dictated quick action or a missed opportunity.

I took the bus to Westport and a taxi to Croagh Patrick with everyone along the way telling me I was crazy to start so late, during a storm, with the gloom of night approaching. Looking back it was foolish. I was on the mountain alone. If I fell there was no one but Irish sheep (Angus Dei, “Lamb of God”) to hear my cry.

Halfway up the mountain there is a large cairn, a pile of rocks that looked like a small pyramid. A marble sign gave instructions: “Circle the cairn seven times praying The Our Father and Hail Marys.”

I did so, careful how I walked. In the Celtic tradition the way you walk is important. If you want to bless something, you walk clockwise or sunrise around it. It’s called deosil (jesh-il). If, on the other hand, you want to curse someone or something, you walk tuaitheal (too-hil) counter sun wise, counter clockwise.

The environmental implications of this idea become increasingly clear. We who walk “against the sun,” against the ways of nature, have become a curse to the planet. It’s important how we walk.

On the steps of the white stucco chapel at the top of Croagh Patrick I took out the snickers bar and orange drink from my pack and set them on the railing. Despite the unorthodox communion elements and the wind that was so strong that the bottle of orange drink kept getting blown off the step, it was one of the most memorable Eucharistic experiences of my life. There was not another soul within miles, but I had no doubt that I was communing with all Creation.

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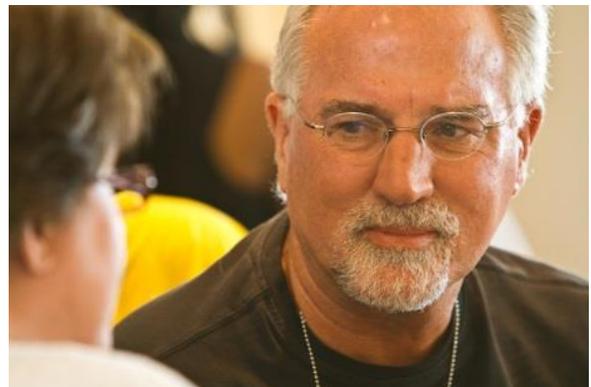


Photo by Gerry Ellis