

August 31, 2008

Dear Parishioners,

This past July, I had the good fortune of traveling to the Isle of Iona while in Scotland with friends. Iona is located off the west coast of Scotland known as the Inner Hebrides.

It was in the 6<sup>th</sup> century that the Irish monk Columba voyaged from Ireland to Iona and there established a monastery which over time became a vitally important place of pilgrimage and learning in Scottish history.

None of the original monastic buildings still exist since they were built in wood. However, there is St. Oran's Chapel which dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century; and a monastery in stone from the 1400's located near the sea and looking on to the Isle of Mull. To quote the poet William Stafford, I find that "my life deepens" in such surroundings.

Since the Reformation, no monastic community has lived there. Yet, in the 1930's a Church of Scotland minister named George MacLeod, who worked in a parish in Glasgow among the poor, began to re-build the monastic ruins at Iona making them into a place a solitude and prayer where those working in ministry might find spiritual renewal. Today there exists at the monastery a core community of lay people living there who, by prayer and action, foster the gospel message of justice and peace for all peoples of the world. And so, in the spirit of Columba, Iona continues to be a spiritually vital place where lives are deepened.

Is it a prerequisite to journey to such places to have my life deepen? It isn't. And I'm reminded of St. Augustine when he said that to find such a 'place', one must learn to travel not with steps, but with yearnings. It was such yearning that defined Columba's life and which gave it direction.

Like Columba, may a yearning for God stir within our distracted lives that seem adrift at times. Like Columba, may we learn that such yearning deepens through 'islands' of prayer and mindfulness that can open us to the 'mysterious sea' of God's presence.

Father Tim