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St Ita's Church, Killeedy, Co. Limerick

15 January

ITA [ITE, ÍDE, MIDA, DEIRDRE]
of Killeedy, Co. Limerick



St Ita
(Richard King, *Capuchin Annual*)

Ita was born of noble and apparently Christian parents in about 480 in Co. Waterford. She was first known as Deirdre, before adopting the name Ita as a punning reference to her 'hunger for Divine Love'.

When she reached a suitable age her father sought to arrange her marriage with a noble youth. By dint of her prayers an angel of the Lord appeared to her father, persuading him that she should be permitted to take up the religious life, predicting that 'in another part of the country shall she serve our Lord, and become patron over the race that inhabits it'. Needless to say, her father consented to her taking up the religious life and she set off to seek a place to found her monastery, which was later to be called Killeedy [Ita's Church].

Pious women flocked to her establishment to place themselves under her rule. A local chieftain offered her some land surrounding her monastery, but she accepted only four acres, which she converted into a vegetable garden. She subjected herself to regular, rigorous fasting, frequently spending up to four days without food of any kind. This met with divine disapproval and an agreement was reached whereby she would be miraculously supplied with food from heaven, which she was obliged to consume.

She was endowed with miraculous powers of healing, as when she restored the power of speech to a local wise man, and of prophecy, with a particular ability to detect transgressions, which she used to protect one of her nuns, who was unjustly suspected of theft, and to point out the actual culprit, who immediately forsook the religious life.

Both Brendan of Clonfert and Mochmóg are supposed to have received their early educations in her celebrated school for boys. She is awarded the

distinction of being called 'Foster Mother of the Irish Saints' and is recognised as patroness of the Parish of Killeedy.

Ita died in 570 at Killeedy, where her grave is situated at the junction of the nave and chancel of the Romanesque church. The grave is still strewn with flowers by pilgrims in the summer, and her feast day is a local holiday.



Church on Ardoilean, Co. Galway

20 January

FECHIN [FEICHÍN, MO-ECA, MO-FHECA]
of Fore, Co. Westmeath



St Fechin (Richard King,
Capuchin Annual)

Fechin was born of noble parents at a place called Bile Feichín in Co. Sligo between 580 and 590. His mother, Lassair, belonged to the royal house of Munster.

Several early 'Lives' exist. He received his education at Achonry in Co. Sligo, under St Nathi. Even at this stage of his life he caused water to flow from dry soil, creating a well, known as 'the well of St Fechin'. On the death of Nathi he left Achonry and went to found monasteries at Fore, Co. Westmeath; Cong, Co. Mayo; Omev Island and Ardoilean [High Island], Co. Galway; Termonfeckin, Co. Louth, and Ballysadare, Co. Sligo.

At Omev he baptised the entire pagan population. Two of his monks died of starvation and the rest of the community was threatened with the same fate until relief was sent by Guaire, King of Connacht.

At Fore, where the number of monks in the community rapidly reached 300, Fechin would not permit women access to the establishment; female servants—