

## **Christine Valkers Paintner's Facebook Post May 16, 2026**

Blessings on this Feast day of St. Brendan!

He is known as the “Navigator” or “Voyager” because his life was defined by his seven year long journey across the sea to find the Island Promised to the Saints.

He hears the call to search for this mythical island and it is revealed in a dream, an angel says he will be with him and guide him there. He brings along a group of fellow monks for community, and searches for seven years sailing in circles, visiting many of the islands again and again.

Each year he celebrates Easter Mass on the back of a whale. Each year he visits the island of the birds, where white-feathered creatures sing the Psalms with his monks. Only when his eyes are opened, does he see that this paradise he seeks is right with him.

There is, of course, the actual narrative of a physical voyage. Tim Severin, a modern sailor in the 1970's, re-created the voyage Brendan took, rebuilding the same boat, and landed in places like Iceland and Greenland. There have been suggestions that Brendan was perhaps the first to land in North America. This is the outward geography of the journey.

There is also a deeper, archetypal layer to this journey, which resonates with our own inner pilgrim – the part of ourselves drawn to make long voyages in search of something for which we long. This is the inward geography of the journey, and one where we may physically only travel a few feet or miles but the soul moves in astronomical measure.

The Navigatio, as the text of Brendan's voyage is known in Latin, is a story of a soul rooted deeply in a monastic tradition and culture, as well as the liturgical cycles and rhythms, in early medieval Ireland. Each of the various parts of their journey take place in 40 and 50 day increments to reflect the liturgical seasons and the rhythms of fasting. They arrive to landfall to celebrate the major feasts and always accompanied by the singing of the Divine Office and chanting of the psalms. Time is not linear on this journey. Brendan and his monks move in circles, spiraling again and again to familiar places from new perspectives.

This journey is an allegory of spiritual transformation and the soul's seeking to live and respond to the world from an experience of inner transfiguration with themes of Brendan's waiting, anticipation, striving, searching, and seeing from a deeper perspective.

The heart of the voyage asks us, what needs to change for the Land Promised to the Saints to be recognized? What is the way required through both illuminated and shadowy interior landscapes? Are we able to stay present through moments of solace, ease, and joy, as well as the anxiety, fear, and sometimes terror that comes when we let go of all that is familiar to follow our heart's calling? Can we see the difficult journey as a passage of initiation?

There is a great deal of waiting in this journey, so much unknowing. There are whole seasons when they feel impatient and confused about why they can't find the place they are seeking so diligently. Yet it is the very journey through the shadows that is required to make the desired discovery.

Brendan doesn't arrive to the promised land he seeks until he has made the arduous journey within and then as Cynthia Bourgeault says, he realizes that he himself is the veil that hides the Paradise he seeks.

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