

THERE is an old Scottish prayer I sometimes say when I light a candle or, better still, our little-used open fireplace: *I will kindle my fire this morning/in the presence of the holy angels of heaven/without malice/without fear of anything under the sun/but with the Holy Son of God beside me.*

I love the intentionality of turning away from fear and seeking that which is good. It marks the threshold of the day, the claiming of a new beginning.

The prayer comes from a collection called the *Carmina Gadelica*, hymns and incantations that were collected orally in the Scottish Highlands by Alexander Carmichael in the late 1800s and translated from Gaelic. There are prayers for the daily activities of the crofter folk. To modern eyes, they are curious and powerful. They name rites of passage as well as give glimpses into the daily hardship of living in cold, remote places.

There are prayers for farewelling men to sea, the pilgrim's aiding, for weaving the cloth, milking the cow



and bathing the child.

A palmful for thine age,/A palmful for thy growth,/A palmful for thy throat,/A flood for thine appetite. I imagine the heartfelt hope that the child would imbibe the mother's milk. The *Charm for Rose* – the swollen breast – begs for the mercy of the mother Mary amid the pain of mastitis.

Visceral also is the pleading in the

incantation against toothache, *The worm that torture me/In the teeth of my head/Hell hard by my teeth/The teeth of hell distressing me.* It still helps to say it even as you reach for the Panadeine.

The blessing of the cloth makes me smile. *Mayest thou wear it,/Mayest thou finish it/Until thou find it/In shreds/In strips/In rags/In tatters.* People who dislike hasty relinquishment may find this useful when refusing to ditch their old shirts.

Generations before us have known there is comfort and joy to be found in tedious tasks by adding a rhyme or a song. The prayers and incantations help you know what greater company you are joining in your actions. Prayers in daily life can help you look up and see what you might belong to. Here is one that gathers us under a big sky:

Grace of the love of the skies be thine,/Grace of the love of the stars be thine,/Grace of the love of the moon be thine,/Grace of the love of the sun be thine,/Grace of the love and the crown of heaven be thine.

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