**St. Columban: Irish Monk, European Missionary, Faithful Pilgrim**

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of this lesson, pupils will:

* Understand the journey and missionary work of St. Columban across Europe.
* Recognise his impact on the Christian heritage of countries like France, Switzerland, and Italy.
* Reflect on what it means to share faith, show courage, and leave a legacy.
* Appreciate how an Irish saint helped shape Christian Europe.

## **Background for the Teacher**

* After leaving Ireland from **Bangor, Co. Down**, around 590 AD, **St. Columban** (also known as Columbanus) travelled with 12 companions across Europe.
* He founded important **monasteries** in **Luxeuil (France)**, **Bregenz (Austria/modern Switzerland)**, and finally **Bobbio (Italy)**.
* His rule of monastic life influenced future monastic traditions and helped re-Christianise parts of Europe during turbulent times.
* St. Columban is known for his courage, writings, deep faith, and as a **"Pilgrim of Hope"**—a theme especially relevant during the **Jubilee Year 2025**.

### **1. Geography/History: Tracing the Journey**

**Interactive Mapping Task**

* Using a map of Europe, trace Columban’s journey:  
  + **Bangor, Ireland** → **Brittany (France)** → **Luxeuil (France)** → **Bregenz (Austria/Switzerland)** → **Bobbio (Italy)**
* Mark the countries and discuss:  
  + What might travel have been like in the 6th/7th century?
  + How far did he travel? (over 2,000 km)
  + Why might people have welcomed Irish monks?

**Activity**: Children draw a simple map or timeline of Columban’s journey.

### **2. Religious Education: Faith in Action**

**Storytelling Focus**:

“Columban walked through forests, crossed mountains, and faced exile—but he never gave up. He brought books, learning, and the Good News of Jesus wherever he went.”

Key Teachings:

* Columban founded **monasteries** as places of **faith, learning, hospitality, and healing**.
* He wrote spiritual **rules** and **letters** to kings and popes, speaking truth with courage.
* His final resting place is in **Bobbio**, where his tomb is a place of pilgrimage today.

Link to **Jubilee Year Theme – “Pilgrims of Hope”**:

* Discuss: How was Columban a Pilgrim of Hope?
* What do *we* carry as pilgrims today? (Kindness, faith, courage)

### **3. English / Literacy**

**Writing Prompt**:

“Imagine you are Columban arriving in France. Write a short letter home to Ireland.”

* What does he see?
* What is the food like?
* What is the weather like?
* How does he communicate with the people ?
* Who does he meet?
* What challenges and blessings does he face?

**Extension**: Create a travel journal with sketches and reflections.

**4. Drama / Role Play**

**Hot-Seating Activity**

* One child takes the role of **St. Columban**.
* Others ask questions:  
  + “Why did you leave Ireland?”
  + “Were you ever afraid?”
  + “What gave you hope?”

💬 Discuss: What would *you* have done in his shoes?

### **5. Art / Visual Task**

**Activity Options**:

* Create a **postcard** from Luxeuil or Bobbio with a drawing on one side and a short message on the back.

OR:

* Draw the **crest or symbol** of one of the monasteries he founded.
* Collage of “What would a pilgrim carry?” – book, candle, cross, walking shoes, etc.

### **6. Reflection & Prayer**

**Discussion Questions**:

* What does it mean to be a missionary or pilgrim today?
* How can we spread kindness and hope like Columban?
* What legacy do we want to leave behind?

**Prayer**:

“Lord, thank you for St. Columban’s courage and faith. Help us to carry hope wherever we go, just like he did. Amen.”

## **Cross-Curricular Integration Chart**

| **Subject** | **Activity** |
| --- | --- |
| **Religious Education** | Life and mission of Columban; link to Jubilee theme |
| **Geography** | Mapping Columban’s journey; understanding countries of Europe |
| **History** | Monastic Europe; Irish missionary influence |
| **English** | Letter writing; travel journal; oral storytelling |
| **Drama** | Role-play, hot-seating; imaginative interaction |
| **Art** | Design symbols, postcards, pilgrim items |
| **SPHE** | Discuss hope, courage, resilience, decision-making |

## **Assessment Opportunities**

* Observation of group participation and engagement
* Evaluation of maps, letters, and drawings
* Reflective journaling or exit slip:  
    
    
   “Something I learned about St. Columban today is…” “One way I can be a pilgrim of hope is…”

## **Optional Homework or Extension Ideas**

* **Research Task**: Find out more about **Bobbio Abbey** today or Columban’s feast day (Nov 23).
* **Art Project**: Make a poster: “From Carlow to Bobbio – St. Columban, Pilgrim of Hope”.
* **Class Display**: Showcase maps, drawings, and writing in a display titled *“Our Pilgrim Saint: Columban Across Europe”*.