

The Light of Life

Like other apparitions of Our Lord and Our Lady, Knock glowed with a heavenly light. A wondrous light emanated from the scene, sparkling at various points like diamonds. Although decidedly bright, the light was soft, shining like silver. A little boy described the light around the altar: “The lamb seemed to be radiating light, a halo of stars around him, glittering jets of light shooting out from his body.” Here below we live in the “shadowlands,” but when heaven is revealed to earth it always sheds a lovely brilliance into our darkness.

Angels

The same boy described a cloud of swirling angels around the altar: “The lamb was surrounded by angels whose wings, he said, were fluttering, though he could not see their faces because they were not turned towards him.” The angels focused on the lamb at the altar and the cross behind him, focusing our attention there also. The apparition reminds Catholics that myriads of angels attend every Mass, leading our worship of the Lamb, once slain for our sins but who now lives and reigns forever.



Pope Francis visits Knock in 2018

Photo courtesy of RollingNews.ie

Silence and Stillness

A most remarkable fact about Knock is that Our Lady did not say a word for the two hours she appeared. St. Joseph, too, was silent, and even St. John the Evangelist, although apparently preaching, made no sound. Neither did they move much during those two hours. It was as if they were in silent adoration, pointing out that, before the Word Incarnate on the altar, silence is the best response.

The fundamental error most make in the Sacred Liturgy is *activism*. We have been taught over the last fifty years that if we are not “doing something” at Mass, we are not “actively participating.” So everyone has to have a job at a parish Mass: lector, Eucharistic Minister, usher, greeter, singer, etc. Those without an official liturgical role must move their arms and legs, move their mouths and lips in so-called “active participation.” Our Lady shows us at Knock that the most actual participation in the Mass is to contemplate, to say nothing, to keep still in wordless wonder. Mary, Joseph, and John join the choirs of angels in surrounding the Lamb upon the altar in reverent adoration.

Knock also encourages the practice of *Eucharistic Adoration*, that time of completely silent worship of the Incarnate Christ. The fact that Mary prayed without moving for two hours, two “holy hours” if you will, shows us what kind of time we can give in adoration before the Lamb of God, sacrificed upon the altar.

Recommended reading

Fr. James OFM, “The Story of Knock,” article for the 1950 Knock Shrine Annual, available at www.ewtn.com/library
Visit the website of Our Lady of Knock Shrine in Ireland: www.knockshrine.ie

Our Lady of Knock

Historical Facts and Essential Messages of Our Lady in 1879



Welcome to Our Lady’s Shrine here in San Francisco. In this pamphlet, prepared by our pastor, Fr. Joseph Illo, you will learn the basic facts and message of this apparition. You are encouraged to spend some time in quiet prayer and perhaps go to confession. Please keep a reverent silence in the Church, especially when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed.

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What: One two-hour apparition of Our Lady with St. John the Evangelist and St. Joseph

Where: Knock, Ireland

When: August 21, 1879

To Whom: 15 villagers and farmers

Knock is a small village (in 2016, population 972 souls) in County Mayo, Ireland. In Gaelic the name means “the hill,” and indeed the village with its small parish church of St. John the Baptist rises above the surrounding farmlands. Even though the village itself has grown little since the apparition, 1.5 million pilgrims visit the site every year, as have all recent popes. Along with Fatima and Lourdes, it is one of Europe’s most visited Marian shrines.

Holy Mary, St. Joseph, and St. John

It was raining hard on the night of August 21, 1879 when Mary Byrne made her way home past the village church. She was amazed to see, through the pouring rain, a glow around the rear gable of the church. A farmer about a half-mile away reported that he saw a large globe of warm light around the church gable. But Mary Byrne saw three figures as she stopped at the church: Our Lady tall and regal, with hands raised in the “orans” position as a priest does at Mass (hands lifted upward at shoulder level, palms facing each other, about 18” apart). To her right was an elderly St. Joseph, with white beard, kneeling with hands folded in prayer. To her left St. John stood forward with open book, in Mass vestments, wearing a bishop’s miter, as if preaching a sermon or teaching. “Oh, look,” said Mary, “they are moving.” But most amazing was what Mary Byrne saw to the left of St. John.

The Lamb at the Altar

To the left of the three saints (Mary, Joseph, and John) stood a lamb on an altar, with a cross behind him, and surrounded by angels. It seemed as if St. John were preaching or teaching about the Holy Mass, the Eucharist, the Word made flesh, while St. Joseph quietly adored at the altar, and Our Lady lifted her hands as if offering the Magnificat: “My soul magnifies the Lord who has looked graciously upon his lowly servant.” The three figures in the middle of the apparition pointed their attention, and the attention of the onlookers, to the altar of sacrifice. The apparition at Knock, therefore, can be said to be about the Holy Eucharist, with Our Lady showing us how to pray at Mass, in the presence of the Lamb of Sacrifice. St. John shows priests and bishops how they should preach and teach in the presence of the Holy One, and St. Joseph shows the congregation how they should bow their heads and hearts in prayer during the Holy Sacrifice.

Mary Byrne ran home to tell her mother, who came to see the apparition. Over the next two hours, 14 people watched and prayed there. While the scene did not change, the figures moved gently as the apparition seemed to advance and recede as a soft radiance emanated from the saints. The day deepened into dusk, and then into night, but people still saw the figures clearly. Not a word was spoken by Mary, Joseph, or John, but they seemed so alive that an old woman spontaneously threw herself upon Mary’s feet but felt nothing tangible. She returned to her place to continue praying the rosary. While the driving rain drenched everything else, the church wall and ground under the apparition remained dry.



How Our Lady Appeared

Our Lady seemed to hover a few feet above the ground. Although she is neither divine nor angelic, Mary has been assumed above the earth and so usually hovers above the ground in her visits to our world, as for example at Lourdes

and Fatima. At Knock she wore a white cloak, hanging in full folds and fastened at the neck. She was focused in prayer with uplifted hands, and a golden crown on her forehead, alive with sparkling crosses. Her eyes were raised up to heaven, not looking at the altar but seeing through the earthly liturgy to the heavenly liturgy. She is in heaven, while we are on earth. We cannot see beyond the sacraments with our eyes, but we can perceive God’s presence through them with our minds enlightened by divine faith. Our Lady at Knock trains our minds and hearts to see more than bread and wine at Mass, more than the frail human nature of the priest and more than the stumbling words of those who read the Word of God. Her own gaze points our eyes upward, to the Lamb in glory, seated at the right hand of the Father, in the Holy Spirit.

Our Lady of Knock is essentially a message about the **Holy Sacrifice of the Mass**, a revelation about the Sacred and Divine Liturgy. The three saints show us how to regard the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: while the Lamb is on the altar, Our Lady looks to heaven, St. Joseph kneels in adoration, and St. John boldly preaches about the Eucharistic mystery.