



# OUR LADY OF KNOCK

St. Peter Catholic Church † Faith Fact † May 2016

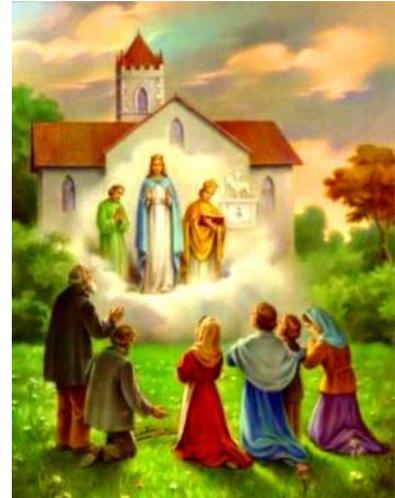


By **PAUL E. DUGGAN**

*Knock is a manifestation of the mystery of redemption wrought by the Lamb of God. By a felicitous symbolism conceived in heaven, the Queen of Knock reveals in her person something of that singular grace and beauty conferred on her by this mystery... She appears as the climax of human redemption. This unique completion of redemption in Mary has already crowned her in heaven as the divine ideal which foreshadows the absolute victory and transfiguration awaiting the Church on its entry into eternity.* ~Father Hubert, O.F.M. Cap.

Devotion to Mary is integral to the faith of Ireland. St. Patrick not only entrusted his missionary work to her intercession but he also sought her continued presence with the Irish people. [...]

**The apparitions.** God rewards fidelity: Knock is a simple village of hardworking, God-fearing farmers. The evening of August 21, 1879, will never be forgotten by the inhabitants of this village in County Mayo.



As evening came, a steady downpour began. Few were outside, but those hearty souls noticed a heavenly light emanating from the village church. An elderly lady saw the light. She looked at it intently and then cried out, "The Blessed Virgin!" A man ran through the streets shouting, "Come quickly! The Blessed Virgin is here at the Church!"

Witnesses, comprised of all ages, saw a heavenly apparition on the exterior of the southern wall of their parish church, St. John the Baptist. For more than two hours, Our Lady, St. Joseph and St. John the Evangelist were present on that gable. To their right, and in the middle of the gable, there was a plain altar and on it a Lamb was standing. A large cross was behind, and above, the Lamb. This scene was enveloped in the brilliance of heavenly light, and angels hovered about the Lamb.

Since then, some have referred to Our Lady of Knock under her ancient title, Queen of the Angels. Many people today attribute the sanctity of family life, remaining strong with the Irish people, to the special grace that this vision at Knock represents.

As the news spread, pilgrims by the thousands arrived at Knock with their sick. A large number of unusual cures were reported. Those who claimed a cure left their crutches and canes at the site, and many of those supports were attached to the wall. Pilgrims snatched plaster and bits of cement off the apparition wall for relics in 1879 and the 1880s. In the fall of 1880, a statue of Our Lady of Knock was erected where she had been seen during the vision. Knock had become a place for pilgrimage: one-and-a-half million visitors trek there annually.

Additional apparitions occurred on Jan. 6 and Feb. 10 and 12, 1880. The visions remained the same. Mary stood in the middle of the light from heaven, wearing a long gown and a crown of pulsating brilliance, with a golden rose over her forehead. Her hands were raised to the height of her shoulders, reaching out to the people but pointing heavenward. St. Joseph stood on her right, with St. John the Evangelist to the left. To the left of the group was an altar with a large cross, a Lamb was at the foot of the cross, and angels surrounded the cross in adoration.

This blessing upon Ireland apparently was expected because of the constant devotion to Mary that had always been exhibited on that island. St. Joseph was revered. St. John the Evangelist and the Irish people both knew love: Knock is a sign of that love.

**The Lord's messenger.** Peace resides in the heart of the Virgin's Son. Those who seek peace seek God. Those who seek Him find Him. At times, He sends His mother to earth, clothed with her divine maternity and power, but still a sister and mother to all humankind. [...]

In most cases of alleged appearances, from early Christian times to the present, the Church finds that there is no evidence for thinking that Mary was really there: maybe a mistake or a hallucination, a hoax or a psychological problem.

But the Church has given its approval for devotion to some few of these apparitions in this difficult area of private revelation. We do not have to believe in the truth of any private revelation. But we *may* believe in them when, after a thorough investigation, official experts find them to be believable and to contain nothing contrary to faith. [...]

The Church officially investigated this happening at Knock in 1879, and again in 1936. It was found that the witnesses were believable and that there was nothing contrary to the faith.

Four recent popes have honored Knock. Pius XII blessed the Banner of Knock at St. Peter's and decorated it with a special medal on All Saints' Day, 1945. It was the Marian year. On this occasion, the Pope announced the new feast of the Queenship of Mary. Pope John XXIII presented a special candle to Knock on Candlemas Day in 1960. He had always regarded it as one of outstanding shrines devoted to Our Lady. Pope Paul VI blessed the foundation stone for the Basilica of Our Lady, Queen of Ireland, on June 6, 1974. Pope John Paul II came, in person as a pilgrim, to the shrine on Sept. 30, 1979. He addressed the sick and the nursing staff, celebrated Mass, established the shrine church as a basilica, presented a candle and the golden rose to the shrine, and finally knelt in prayer at the apparition wall.

**The Great Famine.** It is recorded that Mary said nothing at all during these apparitions. She simply came to her people, to be with them in their hour of need.

A few years ago, a sesquicentennial Mass recalled the suffering of Ireland on the western seaboard during that decade of awful starvation in the 1840s. The term *An Gorta Mor* referred to that great famine, that great hunger, that great calamity.

The years preceding the apparitions were the most tragic years in the history of Ireland. Famine and unimagined misery engulfed the entire Catholic country. Ships took away cattle and grain, and the people were left to starve. Priests often anointed as many as 40 parishioners a day with "extreme unction" as they faced death. The magnitude of such suffering was unimaginable. [...]

A million people died of "the sickness," the result of starvation. Three million lined up daily at the soup kitchens; 2 million emigrated, but thousands did not survive the crossing, dying in the "coffin ships"; another million emigrated before the end of the century. The population of Ireland had been halved. The Irish had then become the most emigration-oriented people in the entire world.

Such a physical horror today is impossible to imagine. Only the former Third World can offer what would be a similarity to these dreadful years, when "the blackening" of the potato crops left millions, without food, to die. The Famine was called "Great" because 1 million people died of simple starvation. [...]

In 1879, the potato crop was threatened once again. Rents rose; money was borrowed; evictions occurred daily. People became desperate. Finally, in April of 1879, the meeting of the Land League was held at Irishtown near Knock: This was the beginning of the end for the landlords.

**The Christian ideal.** The pastor of Knock had begun a series of 100 consecutive Masses for the happy repose of those who had died and had been so precious to him, Mary's apparition took place on the evening of that day when the 100th Mass was celebrated on Aug. 21, 1879. In the midst of Ireland's agony, the mother of the Lord came to her people to be with them, to be present to them, to share their fate in silence.

Our Lady does not exist in isolation. She is the type, the figure, of the Church. Mary is what we are destined to be. When we speak of Mary, we speak of ourselves; we state the Christian ideal of Mary and womankind.

As has been proclaimed before, in her life and person Our Lady expresses to perfection what it means to believe, to love and to be loved, to be graced and to be saved. She is indeed redemption's finest hour.

To accept, freely and without reservation, God's salvation in His Son, Jesus the Christ; to accept and to fulfill one's function in redemption; to bring our grace-life of service to the salvation of others—this is to be Christian. [...]

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