

## THE STORY OF OUR LADY OF KNOCK

Contributed by Brian P. Hegarty Jr.

On the evening of August 21, 1879 Mary McLoughlin, the housekeeper to the parish priest of Knock, County Mayo, Ireland, was astonished to see the outside south wall of the church bathed in a mysterious light; there were three figures standing in front of the wall, which she mistook for replacements of the stone figures destroyed in a storm. She rushed through the rain to her friend Margaret Byrne's house.

After a half hour Mary decided to leave and Margaret's sister Mary agreed to walk home with her. As they passed the church they saw an amazing vision very clearly: Standing out from the gable and to the west of it appeared the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph and St. John. The figure of the Blessed Virgin was life-size, while the others seemed to be neither as large nor as tall. They stood a little away from the gable wall about two feet from the ground. The Virgin was erect with her eyes toward Heaven, and she was wearing a large white cloak hanging in full folds; on her head was a large crown.

Mary Byrne ran to tell her family while Mary McLoughlin gazed at the apparition. Soon a crowd gathered, and all saw the apparition. The parish priest, Archdeacon Cavanaugh, did not come out, however, and his absence was a disappointment to the devout villagers. Among the witnesses were Patrick Hill and John Curry. As Patrick later described the scene: 'The figures were fully rounded, as if they had a body and life. They did not speak but, as we drew near, they retreated a little towards the wall.' Patrick reported that he got close enough to make out the words in the book held by the figure of St. John.

An old woman named Bridget trench drew closer to embrace the feet of the Virgin, but the figure seemed always beyond reach. Others out in the fields and some distance away saw a strange light around the church. The vision lasted for about three hours and then faded.

The next day a group of villagers went to see the priest, who accepted their report as genuine; he wrote to the diocesan Bishop of Tuam; then the Church set up a commission to interview several people claiming to witness the apparition. The diocesan hierarchy was not convinced, and some members of the commission ridiculed the visionaries, alleging they were victims of a hoax perpetrated by the local Protestant constable! But the ordinary people were not so skeptical, and the first pilgrimages to Knock began in 1880. Two years later Archbishop John Joseph Lynch of Toronto made a visit to the parish and claimed he had been healed by the Virgin of Knock. In due course many of the witnesses died. But Mary Byrne married, raised six children, living her entire life in Knock. When interviewed again in 1936 at the age of eighty-six, her account did not vary from the first report she gave in 1879.

The village of Knock was transformed by the thousands who came to commemorate the vision and to ask for healing for others and themselves. The local church was too small to accommodate the crowds. In 1976 a new church, Our Lady Queen of Ireland, was erected. It holds more than two thousand and needs to, for each year more than half million visitors arrive to pay their respects to the Blessed Virgin.

The Church approved the apparition in 1971 as being quite probable, although it has never been formally stated. The Shrine at Knock is opened year-round. In 1994 three life-sized statues were erected of Our Lady, St. Joseph and St. John.

**MARY BYRNE**  
**TESTIMONY OF APPARITION**



**2ND COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY, 1936**

Mary was eighty-six at the time of the second Commission of Enquiry. She was interviewed by the commissioners in her bedroom, as she was too ill to leave. She gave her final testimony and concluded with the words:

*'I am clear about everything I have said, and I make this statement knowing I am going before my God'*

Mary died six weeks later.

**NOTES:**

1. How many Popes have visited Knock?
2. Is it recognized in the catholic church as "the feast of Knock."