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Mass on the 20th anniversary of St Josemaría's Canonisation at Knock Shrine

Homily by Fr Donncha Ó
hAodha

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*“I am Patrick Hill; I live in
Claremorris; my aunt lives at Knock; I
remember the 21st August last; on
that day I was drawing home turf, or
peat, from the bog on an ass.*

While at my aunt's at about eight o'clock in the evening, Dominick Byrne came into the house; he cried out: 'Come up to the chapel and see the miraculous lights, and the beautiful visions that are to be seen there'. I followed him; another man by name Dominick Byrne, and John Durkan, and a small boy named John Curry, came with me; we were all together; we ran over towards the chapel. (...)

We saw the figures – the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph and St. John, and an altar with a Lamb on the altar, and a cross behind the lamb. (...)

I saw the figures and brightness; the boy, John Curry, from behind the wall could not see them; but I did; and he asked me to lift him up till he could see the grand babies, as he called the figures.

It was raining (...) After we prayed a while I thought it right to go across

the wall and into the chapel yard. I brought little Curry with me; I went then up closer; I saw everything distinctly. The figures were full and round as if they had a body and life; they said nothing; but as we approached they seemed to go back a little towards the gable.

I distinctly beheld the Blessed Virgin Mary, life size, standing about two feet or so above the ground clothed in white robes which were fastened at the neck.

Patrick Hill, October 1879

“My name is Bridget Trench; I live near the chapel at Knock. About half past seven o’clock on the night of the 21st of August, I was in the house of Mrs. Campbell, which was quite near to the chapel. While I was there Mary Byrne came in and said there was a sight to be seen at the chapel such as we never before beheld, and she told us all to come and see it(...) I went out

immediately and went to the spot indicated.

When I arrived there I saw distinctly the three figures, I threw myself on my knees and exclaimed "A hundred thousand thanks to God and to the glorious Virgin that has given us this manifestation."(...)

I continued to repeat the rosary on my beads while there, and I felt great delight and pleasure in looking at the Blessed Virgin. I could think of nothing else while there but giving thanks to God repeating my prayers."

Bridget Trench (74 years old),
October 1879.^[1]

The apparition at Knock says many things to us and we could contemplate it for a long time. It is the love of Mary, always close to her children, especially those who are suffering or needy. It is the mystery of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Word

in St John the Apostle who proclaims the word of God, and at the centre of the Liturgy of the Eucharist: the sacrificial Lamb on the altar in front of a cross and surrounded by angels. It is also Eucharistic Adoration: The apparition is full of an eloquent silence. Our Lady is in an attitude of prayer before Christ the Lamb on the altar. The apparition is also an icon of the Church, the People of God: angels, saints and the people of Knock. The Eucharistic Body is at the heart of the Mystical Body.

There are many riches in the Knock apparition. One of them, that emerges from the accounts of the witnesses just referred to, is the fact that this heavenly apparition occurs in the midst of the ordinary everyday life of ordinary everyday people. It is in the middle of the bog and the donkey, the rain and the field, in the visits to family and neighbours, that God and his Mother come to visit

their people. God comes to us in the ordinary, in the everyday, in the midst of our work and family life, in our homes, in our rest.

Today we give thanks for the canonisation of St Josemaría in St Peter's Square twenty years ago by Pope St John Paul II. On that occasion St John Paul taught:

“St Josemaría was chosen by the Lord to announce the universal call to holiness and to point out that daily life and ordinary activities are a path to holiness. One could say that he was the saint of ordinary life. In fact, he was convinced that for those who live with a perspective of faith, everything is an opportunity to meet God, everything can be an incentive for prayer. Seen in this light, daily life reveals an unexpected greatness. Holiness is truly within everyone's reach.”^[2]

Daily life reveals an unexpected greatness. Holiness is truly within everyone's reach. As St Josemaría put memorably put it: “There is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it”.^[3] This greatness of the ordinary, the sublime within the simple, the divine in the human: Knock teaches us all of this too.

This great reality, the greatness of the ordinary and the universal call to holiness, have their roots in the Incarnation, in the reality of God made man. As the Second Vatican Council reminded us: “By his incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way, united himself with each man and woman. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he

has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things but sin”.^[4]

We could say that the interventions of God and his Mother throughout human history, and also at Knock, follow this “logic of the Incarnation”. God is Emmanuel, God is with us. God is calling us to be close to him and he is not far away, but close, so close, in the ordinary, in our work, in our daily life.

There is an interesting Irish proverb or *seanfhocal*: “*Is gaire cabhair Dé ná an doras*”: God’s help is nearer to us than the door. Maybe it could seem a bit pedestrian or naïve. We might object: “It all depends how near the door is to you!” However this *seanfhocal* comes from a particular oral tradition rooted in past centuries in Ireland, a time of poverty and small little dwellings. A few years ago I was standing in the cottage in which John Curry, the

youngest of the Knock visionaries was born (This child John Curry, the youngest of the Knock witnesses was mentioned in the testimony of Patrick Hill, which we heard at the beginning of this homily). This little house is only a mile up the road from here. It is very small. You can practically touch the door from wherever you are standing in that cottage. God's help is closer to us, even closer than that, always and everywhere!

We can ask the intercession of St Josemaría, saint of the ordinary, to help us draw out the practical conclusions of this closeness of God. God is near us in the ordinary and in the everyday: this is a source of serenity and joy, no matter what. God is Emmanuel, by our side, and on our side: this is the reason for our confidence and daring in the apostolate, in sharing the Gospel with others.

We can pray too to St Teresa of Avila, whose feast day it is today and to whom St Josemaría was very devoted. St Teresa famously said: “Know that even when you are in the kitchen, our Lord moves amidst the pots and pans”. Indeed, the Lord awaits us among the pots and pans, among the computers and books, in the fields, in the school, at the gym, in the pub, on the side of the road and in the traffic. May we have the serenity and joy in our daily work and life that come from knowing that God is close, very close. May we have the daring and confidence in sharing Christ with others which are a consequence of God’s nearness. In a word, may we have an ever deeper faith in the Incarnation and in all the joyous consequences that flow from this central mystery of our faith.

In this Celebration of the Eucharist, as in every Mass, the whole Communion of Saints is actively

present. We are accompanied by the whole of heaven. Thus we invoke all the saints and here, in a special way we pray to St Joseph and St John the Evangelist. We also say:

“St Teresa of Avila, St John Paul II and St Josemaría, pray for us”

“Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, pilgrim to this apparition chapel in 1980,^[5] pray for us”

“Our Lady of Knock, Queen of Ireland and Queen of Peace, pray for us”

Amen.

^[1] For the Knock apparition witnesses’ accounts see: https://www.knockshrine.ie/downloads/?doing_wp_cron=1665678967.93830299377

^[2] St John Paul II, Address, 7 October 2002 at: <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/>

2002/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20021007_opus-dei.html

[3] St Josemaría, *Conversations*, 114.

[4] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* 22.

[5] <https://opusdei.org/en-ie/article/mass-of-thanksgiving-for-the-beatification-of-blessed-alvaro-at-the-shrine-of-knock/>

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