Apparition of the Virgin Mary at KNOCK

IRELAND, 1879

On August 21, 1879, Mary McLaughlin, 45-year old housekeeper of the church administered by the Archbishop Bartholomew Vaughan, went to the nearby cottage of Mary Byrne at about 7 PM. Along the way, on the south side of the church she saw the figures of the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph and Saint John the Evangelist dressed as a Bishop, mistaking them for statues, and also an altar with a red cross and a lamb, traditional image of Jesus, with Angels in adoration. Mrs. McLaughlin thought that the Archbishop had himself acquired those images in Dublin. After half an hour the two women returned to lock the main door, and saw there again the figures, and realized that it was instead an apparition. Then Mary called her brother Damnick, her mother and her sister, both named Margaret, and informed also the people of the surrounding area. Her cousin Damnick Sr. his son Patrick, their servant John Durkan and little six-year-old Curry John rushed there. Meanwhile, Mary Byrne had run to the house of her friend Judith Campbell and the seventy-five-year-old Bridget Trench, who later gave a detailed account of the apparition.

On the evening August 21, fifteen people between the ages of five and seventy-five and of both genders, were thus witnesses of an apparition at the south side of the small parish church of the town, the church of Saint John the Baptist. The Virgin Mary was described as being life-size, slightly elevated from the ground, dressed in white, with a rose on her bright crown. Patrick Hill reported of having seen her eyes, with iris and pupils. She was described as "immerged in prayer", with her eyes turned towards Heaven. Bridget Trench stated: "It went immediately to kiss the feet of the Blessed Virgin, but in my embrace I did not grasp anything but the wall, and was left amazed that it was not possible to touch the figures which I had seen and identified so clearly". Saint Joseph was described to be in white garments at the right of the Virgin, with his head inclined towards her, with grizzled hair and beard. Saint John the Evangelist was in prayer at the left of the Virgin, with a long robe and a Bishop’s mitre, slightly turned towards the others and with a large book resembling a Bible in his hands. These present recited the Rosary under the incessant rain, for more than two hours. The witnesses reported that the ground had remained completely dry during the event, despite the rain. After about two hours the apparition suddenly ceased, with the figures never having moved nor spoken. An ecclesiastical commission of inquiry was formed by the Archbishop of Tuam, John MacHale. In 1886 the apparition was recognized worthy of belief and devotion to it was authorized. In 1979, on the occasion of the centennial, Pope John Paul II went to visit the shrine.