

The Marian Pilgrimage: Day Ten: Saturday 16 May 2020

The Shrine of Our Lady of Knock, Ireland



Pope Francis lights a candle at the Knock Shrine in Co Mayo in 2018. He commemorates the fifteen local people who said they saw an apparition of Mary, St Joseph, St John the Evangelist, and a lamb in the village.

It was a very wet evening in Knock on 21 August 1879, when fifteen local people saw the apparition of Mary, St Joseph, St John the Evangelist, and a lamb standing on an altar before a cross, on the parish church's gable wall.

First to see the vision at about 8pm were Mary Beirne (26) and Mary McLoughlin, housekeeper to Knock Parish Priest Archdeacon Bartholomew Cavanagh.

Mary Beirne ran home to tell her parents and soon other locals were alerted. All stood staring at the silent vision on the gable wall for about two hours while reciting the Rosary.

The following October Archbishop of Tuam, John McHale, set up an Inquiry into the Apparitions. It was made up of three parish priests, including Archdeacon Cavanagh, and six curates. All fifteen witnesses were interviewed and their testimony was found to be "trustworthy and satisfactory." It found no explanation of the Apparitions from natural causes and dismissed suggestions fraud may have been involved.

In her witness statement, Mary Beirne identified St John the Evangelist in the Apparition from " a statue at the chapel of Lecanvey near Westport, Co Mayo". She said "it was this coincidence of figure and pose that made me surmise, for it is only an opinion, that the third figure was that of St John, the beloved disciple of Our Lord, but I am not in any way sure what saint or character the figure represented.

After looking at the apparition for about half an hour she "went to the priest's house and told what I had beheld, and spoke of the beautiful things that were to be seen at the gable of the chapel. I asked him or said, rather, it would be worth his while to go to witness them. He appeared to make nothing of what I said, and consequently he did not go."

She "did not return to behold the visions again after that, remaining at my house. I saw the sight for fully an hour."

The first recorded cure at Knock after the apparitions - a deaf person recovering their hearing - took place twelve days later. Over a year later, in October 1880, Archdeacon Cavanagh had recorded six hundred and thirty-seven cures.

A second inquiry into Knock was set up in 1935 by then Archbishop of Tuam, Thomas Gilmartin. It examined the two surviving witnesses of the apparition living in Knock, Mary O'Connell (formerly Mary Beirne) then aged eighty-six, as well as Patrick Byrne, then seventy one.

As part of this inquiry, a special tribunal was set-up by the Archbishop of New York to formally question John Curry, a Knock witness then living in New York. He was five when the apparition took place and had been lifted up by fellow witness Patrick Hill to see the vision.

In their final report the 1936 Commission, as it became known, stated that all witnesses examined were "upright" and their testimonies "satisfactory". It added that Mary O'Connell (formerly Beirne), in particular, had left "a most favourable impression."

There has been some scepticism, about the nature of these sightings- some even suggesting a Magic Lantern trick. That is mostly hearsay, but it gathered some momentum for a period.

However fruits that have flourished from that particular episode incline us to leave scepticism aside. Two popes have visited Knock and two saints: Pope St John Paul, who visited in 1979 to mark the Centenary of the Apparitions; St Teresa of Calcutta was there in June 1993, and Pope Francis visited in August 2018.





Pope Francis and the Victims of Abuse

Pope Francis addressed the crowd at the shrine earlier today, telling them that in his silent prayer to the statue of the Virgin Mary, he presented to her all of the victims of abuse committed by members of the Church in Ireland.

“None of us can fail to be moved by the stories of young people who suffered abuse, were robbed of their innocence and left scarred by painful memories. This open wound challenges us to be firm and decisive in the pursuit of truth and justice,” he said.

I beg the Lord’s forgiveness for these sins and for the scandal and betrayal felt by so many others in God’s family. I ask our Blessed Mother to intercede for the healing of the survivors and to confirm every member of our Christian family in the resolve never again to permit these situations to occur.

The Holy Father met victims of clerical, religious and institutional abuse.

The pontiff also addressed the issue of clerical abuse in his keynote speech at Dublin Castle, commenting that he could not fail to “acknowledge” the scandal. The faith of Ireland’s Catholics continues, despite everything Mass attendance, although falling, is still among the highest in Europe, where scandals have dented people’s faith in the Church, but faith itself has not died.

Cardinal Paul Cullen, Archbishop of Dublin and architect of Catholic Ireland in modern times.



The recovery of the Catholic Church from years of persecution and poverty began in 1850 with the appointment of Paul Cullen as Archbishop of Armagh and his translation, to use the Church term, to be Archbishop of Dublin in 1852.

This extraordinary man was architect of the heavily-clericalised Irish Catholic Church we have known.

He laid powerful foundations for a Catholic Church that dominated Ireland through the 20th century.

In its early twentieth century "heyday", more than 93 per cent of Irish Catholics attended weekly Mass, the special position of the Catholic Church was recognised in the Constitution, and divorce and artificial contraception were outlawed.

It was also producing so many priests and nuns that between a third and a half went on "the missions". This moved Pope John XXIII to write in 1961 to Ireland's then Catholic Primate Cardinal John D'Alton, saying that "any Christian country will produce a greater or lesser number of priests. But Ireland, that beloved country, is the most fruitful of mothers in this respect."

Today all of that is in steep decline yet there are signs of hope.

The 2016 census in Ireland found that 78.3 per cent of the population still identified as Roman Catholic.

A European Social Survey of eighteen countries that year, and recently published, showed that weekly Mass attendance by Irish Catholics remained high by European standards. It found that 36 per cent of Irish adults attended a religious service at least once a week. The average weekly attendance for the eighteen European countries surveyed was 12.8 per cent.

That survey also found the number of Irish people who pray at least once a week was 55.3 per cent, while the average for the eighteen countries was 30 per cent. It found that Ireland's least religious age group, those aged 16 to 29, were more likely to practise their religion than almost any of their peers in Europe. Of those young Irish, 54 per cent identify as Catholic, 24 per cent attend church weekly outside of special occasions, and 43 per cent pray weekly.

Only their peers in Poland (47 per cent) and Portugal (27 per cent) have a higher weekly Mass attendance.

What all of this indicates is the continuing importance of faith to the Irish people, despite persecution in the past and the betrayal of trust in more recent times.

Where Catholic faith continues to be most clearly seen is in the deep, sustained, compassion of the Irish people. A perfect illustration is their on-going support for causes such as the Catholic Bishops' overseas development agency, Trócaire.

In 2018 it raised €29.1 million, an increase of €12 million on the previous year and the second-highest amount received in the agency's forty-five year history. Irish Catholics remain faithful, generous and compassionate, despite all that has happened.

CENACOLO KNOCK

However, when in Knock it is good to remember that not very far away there is a Cenacolo Community House.



The Cenacolo Community is an organisation which provides a free, fully residential programme to help people suffering from addiction to change their lives.

The Cenacolo Community house in Ireland, for men, was opened in Knock, Co. Mayo in 1999. The Cenacolo Community Movement was founded by an Italian nun, Mother Elvira Petrozzi, [above] in 1983. For many years she had been concerned by the destruction she had seen among people of all ages through drug abuse and she longed to help them. Mother Elvira, together with two companions, Sr. Aurelia and a teacher, NivesGrato, were given an abandoned old house in Saluzzo in Italy, and so Community Cenacolo was born. Today there are houses worldwide with over two thousand men and women in the programme. Mother Elvira believes in showing addicts a better life. She encourages them to find out who they are and to face up to their difficulties. They discover a God who loves them. They learn to accept a simple lifestyle and rediscover the gifts of work, friendship and of faith in the Word of God instead of relying on the crutch of drugs to escape from everything that is too painful to deal with. The

Cenacolo Community relies totally on voluntary contributions as it does not receive any Government grants.

All men and women who wish to find out more about entering Community Cenacolo will be met beforehand by people that have already been through the programme. They are now living their lives free from addiction and are giving up their time to help others achieve the same goal.

A Cenacolo Community House is a place of hope! It is not a "Detox" or a "Rehab". It is a place of hope, certainly for those seeking to escape from addiction (drug/alcohol/gambling etc) but also for those disaffected by life who want to experience a simpler life in a Christian environment. In Cenacolo there are no psychiatrists or social workers; this is a "peer-led" community where men live together, respecting each other, themselves and the firm rules of the Community. The main foundations of the Community are: Friendship, Work and Prayer. In this way self-esteem and self-confidence grow.

It is possible to visit by arrangement, but this is rare and usually restricted to those who support the community, or have a personal connection with members. On Monday evenings at St Mary's, Inverness the 1800 hrs Mass is celebrated with the Intention of the Cenacolo Community houses. {when not locked-down, but wherever the 1800 Mass is said it is for Cenacolo. So while at Knock, a special remembrance of all within the Community Cenacolo world-wide}.

In hope and in penitence we travel to Croagh Patrick, with the Knock Cenacolo Community.



Croagh Patrick is renowned for the Pilgrimage in honour of Saint Patrick, Ireland's patron saint. On the summit of the mountain Saint Patrick fasted for forty days in 441 AD.

Croagh Patrick (Irish: Cruach Phádraig, meaning '(Saint) Patrick's Stack'), nicknamed the Reek, is a 764 m (2,507 ft) mountain and an important site of pilgrimage in Mayo, Ireland. It is 8 km (5 ml) from Westport. It is the fourth highest mountain in Mayo, and is climbed by pilgrims on Reek Sunday every year, which is the last Sunday in July.

On the last Sunday in July, thousands of pilgrims climb Croagh Patrick in honour of Saint Patrick who, according to tradition, fasted and prayed on the summit for forty days in the year 441 AD. Masses are held at the summit, where there is a small chapel. From ancient times pilgrims have climbed the mountain barefoot, as an act of penance, a practice that still continues today.

In medieval times, pilgrims carried stones as an act of penance, or to represent a prayer intention. The stones were carried to the cairn on top of the mountain, or to the Cairn on the "saddle" of the mountain, which marks the unofficial "half-way" point at the base of the summit. This practice of carrying stones or rocks on a pilgrimage, to add to a cairn, was thought to bring good luck.



After we have gone up the mountain, not easy as it is a steep climb over scree and boulders, and said our prayers at the summit in or near the Chapel [seen above], it is time for the more hazardous descent. The scree and difficult footing make for a tricky downwards journey when you will be glad of your walking stick, or sticks.

The Croagh Patrick experience will take about five hours or more, although the fleet of foot and young in years will probably manage it in about three hours. In many ways it is best to make a day of it.

RETURNING HOME:

On the homeward journey [assuming car travel from Larne to Cairnryan] it is rewarding to visit:

The Ecumenical Community at Corrymeela, in Ballycastle , County Antrim.



Corrymeela has a residential centre on the north coast of Ireland that hosts over eleven thousand people a year, as well as a living -in community of volunteers and staff. Corrymeela also has a dispersed community of over one hundred and fifty members who commit to living out Corrymeela's principles of reconciliation in their own communities. Corrymeela's programme-staff travel to work with

school and community groups throughout Northern Ireland, as well as hosting groups on site.

The Corrymeela Staff work alongside people from youth and school groups, family and community organisations, faith communities and political parties. They run group sessions using dialogue, experiential play, art, storytelling, mealtimes and shared community to help groups embrace difference and learn how to have difficult conversations. University groups and other groups visit from different parts of the world. Groups come to learn from the Corrymeela experience, and how to apply the Corrymeela values to divisions within their own societies.



Pádraig Ó Tuama

Leader, 2014 –2019



Pádraig Ó Tuama, a practising Catholic, served as the Leader of the Corrymeela Community from September 2014 to April 2019. He brought twodecades of practice as a theologian and conflict mediator to his role, as well as interests in language and poetry. Ó Tuama's previous work saw him bring diverse groups of people together across conflicted divides. His local work involved developing community and school-based curricula exploring: Groupwork, Narrative Practice, Interfaith dialogue, Arts and Conflict, and Reconciliation. His international research involved interventions on the justification of the death penalty for LGBT people in Uganda. Ó Tuama's poetry has been used in the context of politics too, most recently the poem "Shaking Hands". And so to the Ferry.....



Home to Inverness with thoughts of Ireland, recalling St Columba crossing from Antrim to Iona, and then travelling through the Great Glen to Inverness.

