



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO IRELAND

### HOLY MASS AT THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF KNOCK

#### **HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II**

*Knock*

*Sunday, 30 September 1979*

*'Se do bheatha, a Mhuire, atá lán de ghrásta ...*

*Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, faithful sons and daughters of Mary,*

1. Here I am at the goal of my journey to Ireland : the Shrine of Our Lady at Knock. Since I first learnt of the centenary of this Shrine, which is being celebrated this year, I have felt a strong desire to come here, the desire to make yet another pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Mother of Christ, the Mother of the Church, the Queen of Peace. Do not be surprised at this desire of mine. It has been my custom to make pilgrimages to the shrines of our Lady, starting with my earliest youth and in my own country. I made such pilgrimages also as a Bishop and as a Cardinal. I know very well that every people, every country, indeed every diocese, has its *holy places* in which *the heart of the whole people of God beats, one could say, in more lively fashion*: places of special encounter between God and human beings ; places in which Christ dwells in a special way in our midst. If these places are so often dedicated to his Mother, it reveals all the more fully to us the nature of his Church. Since the Second Vatican Council, which concluded its Constitution on the Church with the chapter on "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and of the Church", this fact is more evident for us today than ever—yes, for all of us, for all Christians. Do we not confess with all our brethren, even with those with whom we are not linked in full unity, that we are *a pilgrim people*? As once this people travelled on its pilgrimage under the guidance of Moses, so we, the People of God of the New Covenant, are travelling on our pilgrim way under the guidance of Christ.

I am here then as a pilgrim, a sign of the pilgrim Church throughout the world participating, through my presence as Peter's Successor, in a very special way in the centenary celebration of this Irish Shrine at Knock.

The Liturgy of the Word of today's Mass gives me my pilgrim's salutation to Mary, as now I come before her in Ireland's Marian Shrine at Cnoc Mhuire, the Hill of Mary.

2. "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (*Lk 1 :42*). These are the words with which Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, greeted Mary, her kinswoman from Nazareth.

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" ! This is also my greeting to Muire Máthair Dé, Mary the Mother of God, Queen of Ireland, at this Shrine of Knock. With these words, I want to express the immense joy and gratitude that fills my heart today in this place. I could not have wanted it any differently. Highlights of my recent pastoral journeys have been the visits to the Shrines of Mary : to our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, to the Black Madonna of Jasna Góra in my homeland, and three weeks ago to our Lady of Loreto in Italy. Today I come here because I want all of you to know that my devotion to Mary unites me, in a very special way, with the people of Ireland.

3. Yours is a long spiritual tradition of devotion to our Lady. Mary can truly say of Ireland what we have just heard in the first reading: "So I took root in an honoured people" (*Sir 24 :12*). Your veneration of Mary is so deeply interwoven in your faith that its origins are lost in the early centuries of the evangelization of your country. I have been told that, in Irish speech, the names of God and Jesus and Mary are linked with one another, and that God is seldom named in prayer or in blessing without Mary's name being mentioned also. I also know that you have an eighth-century Irish poem that calls Mary "Sun of our race", and that a litany from that same period honours her as "Mother of the heavenly and earthly Church". But better than any literary source, it is the constant and deeply rooted devotion to Mary that testifies to the success of evangelization by Saint Patrick, who brought you the Catholic faith in all its fullness.

It is fitting then, and it gives me great happiness to see, that the Irish people maintain this traditional devotion to the Mother of God in their homes and their parishes, and in a special way at this Shrine of Cnoc Mhuire. For a whole century now, you have sanctified this place of pilgrimage through your prayers, through your sacrifice, through your penance. All those who have come here have received blessings through the intercession of Mary. From that day of grace, 21 August 1879, until this very day, the sick and suffering, people handicapped in body or mind, troubled in their faith or their conscience, all have been healed, comforted and confirmed in their faith because they trusted that the Mother of God would lead them to her Son, Jesus. Every time a pilgrim comes up to what was once an obscure bogside village in County Mayo, every time a man, woman or child comes up to the Old Church with the Apparition Gable or to the new Shrine of

Mary Queen of Ireland, it is to renew his or her faith in the salvation that comes through Jesus, who made us all children of God and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. By entrusting yourselves to Mary, you receive Christ. In Mary, "the Word was made flesh" ; in her the Son of God became man, so that all of us might know how great our human dignity is. Standing on this hallowed ground, we look up to the Mother of God and say "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb".

The present time is an important moment in the history of the universal Church, and, in particular, of the Church in Ireland. So many things have changed. So many valuable new insights have been gained in what it means to be Christian. So many new problems have to be faced by the faithful, either because of the increased pace of change in society, or because of the new demands that are made on the People of God—demands to live to the fullest the mission of evangelization. The Second Vatican Council and the Synod of Bishops have brought new pastoral vitality to the whole Church. My revered predecessor Paul VI laid down wise guidelines for renewal and gave the whole people of God inspiration and enthusiasm for the task. In everything he said and did, Paul VI taught the Church to be open to the needs of humanity and at the same time to be unfailingly faithful to the unchanging message of Christ. Loyal to the teaching of the College of Bishops together with the Pope, the Church in Ireland has gratefully accepted the riches of the Council and the Synods. The Irish Catholic people have clung faithfully, sometimes in spite of pressures to the contrary, to the rich expressions of faith, to the fervent sacramental practices, and to that dedication to charity, which have always been a special mark of your Church. But the task of renewal in Christ is never finished. Every generation, with its own mentality and characteristics, is like a new continent to be won for Christ. The Church must constantly look for new ways that will enable her to understand more profoundly and to carry out with renewed vigour the mission received from her Founder. In this arduous task, like so many times before when the Church was faced with a new challenge, we turn to Mary, the Mother of God and the Seat of Wisdom, trusting that she will show us again the way to her Son. A very old Irish homily for the feast of the Epiphany (from the *Leabhar Breac*) says that, as the Wise Men found Jesus on the lap of his Mother, so we today find Christ on the lap of the Church.

4. Mary was truly united with Jesus. Not many of her own words have been preserved in the Gospels; but those that have been recorded refer us again to her Son and to his word. At Cana in Galilee, she turned from her Son to the servants and said "Do whatever he tells you" (*Jn 2 :5*). This same message, she still speaks to us today.

5. "Do whatever he tells you". What Jesus tells us—through his life and by his word—has been preserved for us in the Gospels and in the letters of the Apostles and of Saint Paul and transmitted to us by the Church. We must make ourselves familiar with his words. We do this by listening to the readings from Sacred Scripture in the liturgy of the word, which introduce us to the Eucharistic Sacrifice ; by reading the Scriptures on our own; in the family, or together with friends, by reflecting on what the Lord tells us when we recite the Rosary and combine our devotion to the Mother of

God with prayerful meditation on the mysteries of her Son's life. Whenever we have questions, whenever we are burdened, whenever we are faced with the choices that our faith imposes on us, the word of the Lord will comfort and guide us.

Christ has not left his followers without guidance in the task of understanding and living the Gospel. Before returning to his Father, he promised to send his Holy Spirit to the Church: "But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all I have said to you" (*Jn 14 :26*).

This same Spirit guides the Successors of the Apostles, your Bishops, united with the Bishop of Rome, to whom it was entrusted to preserve the faith and to "preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (*Mk 16 :14*). Listen to their voices, for they bring you the word of the Lord.

6. "Do whatever he tells you". So many different voices assail the Christian in today's wonderful but complicated and demanding world. So many false voices are heard that conflict with the word of the Lord. They are the voices that tell you that truth is less important than personal gain ; that comfort, wealth, and pleasure are the true aims of life; that the refusal of new life is better than generosity of spirit and the taking up of responsibility; that justice must be achieved but without any personal involvement by the Christian ; that violence can be a means to a good end ; that unity can be built without giving up hate.

And now let us return in thought from *Cana in Galilee* to *the Shrine of Knock*. Do we not hear the Mother of Christ pointing him out to us here too and speaking to us the same words that she used at Cana : "Do whatever he tells you"? She is saying it to all of us. Her voice is heard more expressly by my Brothers in the Episcopate, the pastors of the Church in Ireland, who by inviting me here have asked me to respond to an invitation from the Mother of the Church. And so, Venerable Brothers, I am responding, as I enter in thought into the whole of your country's past and as I feel also the force of its eloquent present, so joyful and yet at the same time so anxious and at times so sorrowful. I am responding, as I did at Guadalupe in Mexico and at Jasna Góra in Poland. In my own name and on your behalf and in the name of all the Catholic People of Ireland, I pronounce, at the close of this homily, the following words of trust and consecration :

*Mother*, in this shrine you gather the People of God of all Ireland and constantly point out to them Christ in the Eucharist and in the Church. At this solemn moment *we listen* with particular attention to your words : "Do whatever my Son tells you". And *we wish* to respond to your words with all our heart. We wish to do what your Son tells us, what he commands us, for he has the words of eternal life. We wish to carry out and fulfil all that comes from him, all that is contained in the Good News, as our forefathers did for many centuries. Their fidelity to Christ and to his Church, and their heroic attachment to the Apostolic See, have in a way stamped on all of us an indelible mark that

we all share. Their fidelity has, over the centuries, borne fruit in Christian heroism and in a virtuous tradition of living in accordance with God's law, especially in accordance with the holiest commandment of the Gospel—the commandment of love. We have received this splendid heritage from their hands at the beginning of a new age, as we approach the close of the second millennium since the Son of God was born of you, our *alma Mater*, and we intend to *carry this heritage into the future* with the same fidelity with which our forefathers bore witness to it.

Today therefore, on the occasion of the first visit of a Pope to Ireland, we entrust and consecrate to you, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, our hearts, our consciences, and our works, in order that they may be in keeping with the faith we profess. We entrust and consecrate to you each and every one of those who make up both the community of the Irish people and the community of the People of God living in this land.

We entrust and consecrate to you the Bishops of Ireland, the clergy, the religious men and women, the contemplative monks and sisters, the seminarians, the novices. We entrust and consecrate to you the mothers and fathers, the youth, the children. We entrust and consecrate to you the teachers, the catechists, the students ; the writers, the poets, the actors, the artists, the workers and their leaders, the employers and managers, the professional people, the farmers; those engaged in political and public life; those who form public opinion. We entrust and consecrate to you the married and those preparing for marriage ; those called to serve you and their fellowmen in single life; the sick, the aged, the mentally ill, the handicapped and all who nurse and care for them. We entrust and consecrate to you the prisoners and all who feel rejected; the exiled, the homesick and the lonely.

We entrust to your motherly care the land of Ireland, where you have been and are so much loved. Help this land to stay true to you and your Son always. May prosperity never cause Irish men and women to forget God or abandon their faith. Keep them faithful in prosperity to the faith they would not surrender in poverty and persecution. Save them from greed, from envy, from seeking selfish or sectional interest. Help them to work together with a sense of Christian purpose and a common Christian goal, to build a just and peaceful and loving society where the poor are never neglected and the rights of all, especially the weak, are respected. Queen of Ireland, Mary Mother of the heavenly and earthly Church, a Mháthair Dé, keep Ireland true to her spiritual tradition and her Christian heritage. Help her to respond to her historic mission of bringing the light of Christ to the nations, and so making the glory of God be the honour of Ireland.

Mother, can we keep silent about what we find most painful, what leaves us many a time so helpless? In a very special way we entrust to you this great wound now afflicting our people, hoping that your hands will be able to cure and heal it. Great is our concern for those young souls who are caught up in bloody acts of vengeance and hatred. Mother, do not abandon these youthful hearts. Mother, be with them in their most dreadful hours, when we can neither counsel nor assist them. Mother, protect all of us and especially the youth of Ireland from being overcome

by hostility and hatred. Teach us to distinguish clearly what proceeds from love for our country from what bears the mark of destruction and the brand of Cain. Teach us that evil means can never lead to a good end; that all human life is sacred; that murder is murder no matter what the motive or end. Save others, those who view these terrible events, from another danger : that of living a life robbed of Christian ideals or in conflict with the principles of morality.

May our ears constantly hear with the proper clarity your motherly voice: "Do whatever my Son tells you". Enable us to *persevere with Christ*. Enable us, Mother of the Church, to build up his Mystical Body by living with the life that he alone can grant us from his fullness, which is both divine and human.

A Mhuire na ngrás, a Mháthair Mhic Dé, go gcuire tú ar mo leas mé.

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At the close of this solemn celebration at the Shrine of Knock in honour of Mary, Queen of Ireland and Mother of the Church, I wish to express a special word of greeting to the President of Ireland, who is here present. In greeting him I greet and thank the entire Irish nation for the demonstration of faith shown to the world during this my visit to Ireland and, in particular, during my pilgrimage to the Shrine of Mary at Knock.

I greet also the Taoiseach and the civil authorities present.

And now it gives me great pleasure to announce that, to honour our Blessed Lady in this her centenary year at Knock, the new Church, recently built in her honour, will, from this day forward, be known under the title of the *Basilica of Our Lady, Queen of Ireland*.

And finally I am happy to offer as my personal tribute and gift to the Shrine of Knock a *Rose in gold* which will remain as my testimony of gratitude to Mary, "the Mother of the heavenly and the earthly Church".

Praised be Jesus Christ !

