

Shine in our hearts, oh Lord Jesus Christ, who loves all humanity, the pure light of your divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our minds, that we may understand the announcing of your Holy Gospel. Set us in awe of your blessed commandments, so that trampling all carnal desires, we may begin to live according to the Spirit, both willing and doing everything for your pleasure, for you are the light of our souls and bodies, Christ God, and we render glory to you, and to your eternal father, and to your all holy, good and life-giving spirit, now and always, and forever and ever. Amen.

This retreat is about holiness. Gospel holiness. There are many, many standards of holiness out there. This retreat is about gospel holiness. Wherever one looks in the world, east, west north and south, regardless of which century or climate or, or continent one looks at, there are people proclaiming what holiness is. This retreat is about gospel holiness.

It is about genuine holiness. It is therefore about the authentic way to holiness. That is, it is about the gospel's way to holiness. Said another way, and I don't want these words to scare you, this retreat is about revolution. Revolution. Revolution means turning around, revolve, turning things upside down. It means turning away from one point and turning towards the other point and that's what revolve, or revolution means. This retreat is about turning away from false gods, and from false ideas about holiness, about truth, about meaning, and turning to the true God, Jesus, the Lamb of God. This retreat is also about revolution, my friends, because to be an authentic human being in this world, you must want to be a revolutionary. I repeat, to be an authentic human being, you must want to be a revolutionary. The world in which we live is a furnace of agony, pain, suffering, evil and death. At this very moment, there are not hundreds or thousands or hundreds of thousands of millions, but hundreds of millions of people, at this very second, in some form of misery; mental, physical, spiritual, psychological, and emotional. They are in agony. Whether it be suicidal depression or cancer, whether it be the one child who every nine seconds dies of starvation in this world, a hard and vicious death, slow and painful. Whether it be the one person every six seconds in this world, that wastes away and dies because they cannot get pennies for medicine that could

help them. Wherever we look, at any moment, any second, we live on a planet that is a furnace of agony.

To be human, to just be human, is to want to turn that around. To stop that, to interfere with it, to modify it, is to want to relieve people who are suffering of the suffering that they are going through. To be human is to want to be a revolutionary.

But as Lenin said, to be a revolutionary you have to have first a theory of revolution. And therefore, this retreat is about a theory of revolution, and the theory is quite simple. Holiness, holiness is the revolution. Holiness is the only revolution. In time, or in eternity. Holiness is the only thing that can change things, nothing else, nothing else, can move the world one inch out of the furnace of agony and sin and evil and death it is in. Only God, only God, the holy one, can conquer evil and death and all its manifestations. Only by uniting ourselves with the holy one will we be able to be instruments or channels of that power that can undo evil and death and all its manifestations. Any attempt, any attempt to respond to evil and death and its various manifestations of suffering and debilitation and destruction of soul and body and mind and spirit, any attempt to respond to it outside holiness, without holiness, is like jumping on a waterbed. You jump on the problem here, and it pops up worse over here. And all we have to do to see the truth of that is look at ordinary politics at any given time in the history of the world. The void of holiness it tries to solve problems of evil, and it creates worse and worse and worse problems of evil.

How do I know, how do I know what is genuine holiness? How do I know what is the genuine and authentic way to holiness? Well let me quote you a line that we're all familiar with from scripture, from the New Testament. One is holy; one is Lord, Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father. Jesus is the holy one of Israel. What He manifests in His person, and what He tells us with His words is what is holy, for He is the holy one made flesh. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is what holiness is in this world. Holy is the lamb who is slain. Those are not trite or minor words. Those are the most serious words that could enter our consciousness. For they tell us where the path is, where the direction is,

where God is, where our destiny is, and where our purpose for existence is. We are made to be holy. We know what holiness is, and we know the way to holiness. Exclusively through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

When we, when we talk of holiness, we often think of it and talk about it in terms that come from all other places except the gospel. We have ideas that come from religious writings of holy stories of men and women, writings that to a large extent, are fictional and embellished. We have all kinds of ideas that we have read from this essay and that essay, from this thought and that thought, Christian or non-Christian, but the ultimate place that we have measure everything against is Jesus Christ. Any story of any saint, any life of any saint, is holy only to the extent that it matches and is in total conformity with the life of the holy one, Jesus. He who sees me sees the Father, says Jesus. The Father is holy; Jesus is the holy one of God, he who sees Jesus, he who sees the Lamb of God, sees holiness. As clear as holiness can be seen in history, and there is no other place to look.

Here at Knock, on August 21st, in 1879, through the power of the Holy Spirit there was an apparition. And the centrepiece of that apparition was a lamb. Everyone instantly identified it, and identifies it to this day, as the Lamb of God. It may be important, right here at the beginning, to recognize the fact that perhaps we haven't, even though more than a hundred years have passed, perhaps we haven't sufficiently discerned, paid attention to, opened ourselves up, to the meaning of the apparition, for our own lives, for the lives of the Christians here in Ireland, whether they be Catholic or Protestant, and through Ireland, the lives of people in the world.

Let's begin with this. What does the Lamb of God mean? I mean, you think about it, God on the one hand is God, the creator of the universe, the, the holy one, and on the other hand we're using a term lamb, which is an animal, to identify God. What does Lamb of God mean? Of course, what it does not mean, is that God became an animal; that's obvious. What it is, of course, is it's a symbol, it is a symbol. Lamb of God is a symbol. What occurs here at Knock on August 21st of 1879, the apparition of the lamb,

is a symbol. What is a symbol? As symbol is a sign that points to a reality other than itself. It's a sign that points to a reality other than itself. So for example, a shamrock is a symbol of Ireland. When one looks at a shamrock, one thinks of Ireland. A shamrock just doesn't point to itself, you think of Ireland. It points beyond itself to something else. So also with the Lamb of God. The lamb doesn't point to an animal, the lamb points to something beyond itself. And how do we know what it points to? We know what it points to just by looking at the gospel. After his baptism, when Jesus walks by John the Baptist, John the Baptist says behold the lamb of God, pointing to Jesus. The Lamb of God, as we understand it, is a symbol that points to Jesus. It's a symbol, though, that points to Jesus. And because it is a symbol, there has to be in it some intrinsic values communicated that are the same as the values in Jesus, or else it would not work as a symbol.

For example, a pyramid cannot be a symbol of Ireland. Pyramids are in Egypt; they're in the desert. To have a pyramid as a symbol of Ireland makes no sense at all. To have a pyramid as a symbol of Egypt, that makes tremendous sense. There's an intimate connection. A shamrock is a symbol of Ireland, because shamrocks grow here, because they're green, etcetera, etcetera, there's an intimate relationship between the symbol and the reality. The symbol tries to communicate something of the reality that it's pointing to. That's how symbols work.

Here this week, we are going to learn, we are going to discern, we're going to open ourselves up to the symbol of the lamb of God, the symbol that appeared here in Knock on August 21st, 1879, and the symbol that is ultimately identified in terms of the gospel itself. We are going to encounter also the reality of the Lamb of God beyond the symbol. But the first thing we have to do, is we have to begin to understand the symbol. You know, a hundred and fifty years ago, a little more I suppose, back in America, Indians, American Indians, native Americans, they were sitting on literally trillions of dollars worth of oil. But they didn't know what it was, they didn't understand it, and hence they couldn't use it, they couldn't use it to improve their life, because they didn't understand it, and ultimately they were cheated out of it.

So also with the symbol, the symbol of the Lamb of God. God, and we must never forget this, God is of infinite depth, and therefore the gospel is of infinite depth. We as Christians can never say about the gospel, I've got it all. It can't be that way, because we are finite. We must always, always be open to the grace that God is going to reveal to us, a new depth to his, of his revelation in Jesus.

To say, for example, as so many Christians do, I can't afford to hear any new truths about the gospel, because that would invalidate my whole past life when I didn't know them. That's just nonsense, you can't live a spiritual life that way. You can't live a human life that way. We are constantly by our structure, and by the structure of the world we live in, exposed as time goes on to realities that we didn't know before that. So also in the gospel. When God wants to reveal to us something new in the gospel, and He does, that's the moment when we have the responsibility for living it. It is not the Christian stance at that moment to say I haven't known this for the past 20 or 80 years, therefore I'm just not going to bother with it.

Blessed Theresa Benedicta was an agnostic, maybe even an atheistic Jewish philosopher, when in 1921 she went to visit some philosopher friends at their farmhouse out in the country. And as the mystery of God's working in time and space, the mystery of God's working with people who, who want to know the truth, these two friends of hers were called away right after she got there, and she was left alone in the farmhouse. Being people who were academic people, they had a large library, and she being an academic person, being one of the first women in Germany to ever get a doctorate from the German, through the German system, she started browsing through the books on the shelf. And she picked out that she had never read before, and she began to give it a light look through to see if she wanted to read it, and the light look through turned into an all-night reading. When she finished the book, at about 5:30 in the morning, she closed the book, and she said this is the truth. The book was the autobiography of Saint Theresa of Avila. That day, that morning, Edith Stein, who only the night before, was an agnostic, perhaps atheistic Jewish philosopher, that morning, she went to mass for the

first time. That day, she went out and bought a catechism. Because the day that a new truth comes to you, she says, that is the day when you must begin to live it.

Only God knows why he reveals truth to people at the time that he reveals it. If God wanted to tell us everything at birth, God could tell us everything at birth. But there is something in his design, his providence, that he reveals new understandings at a different moment in life for different people. Our task is, however, to be open to that. To be open in the sense of accepting and then committing to live to it.

Back in 1988, I was here at Knock, right next door, and celebrated a mass out here at the shrine on August 9th, with a priest by the name of George Zabelka. George Zabelka was the Catholic chaplain for the Hiroshima Nagasaki bomb crew in 1945. He blessed the crew, said mass for the crew, took care of the crew's spiritual needs that dropped the atomic, that dropped, the Catholic members of the crew, that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He was a military chaplain for over 20 years. In 1973, which is almost 30 years after he was a military chaplain, after Hiroshima Nagasaki, in 1973, when he was in his early sixties, he saw the reality of the gospel differently. He saw that his condoning and his acceptance of the mass slaughter of human beings was utterly wrong. He struggled with this for 3 years, reading and studying and so forth. And in the Christmas of 1975, 76, he sent a letter out to all of his friends, a Christmas letter, as, as, you know, priests do, they send Xerox letters, mimeograph letters out, in which he told about his, his past year. And then, at the bottom of the letter, he said, I don't want to lose any of you as friends, I don't want to judge you, but I must do an about face. I must do an about face. And then he said that he had come to the conclusion, teachings, were teachings of nonviolent love of all friends and enemies, and he was wrong to participate 30 years ago in that terrible evil, as a priest. His life went on from that point, for the next seven years, just being a priest as a priest is a priest, you know, doing the things that priests do. Seven years later, he is now in his late sixties, seven years later, an article appears in a, in a magazine in the United States, Sojourners magazine, and from that point on, for the, all practically the day of his death, God gave him an entirely new mission into the world. It's like it's a

second life to him. He went all over the world, and people listened to him because of what he was, because of his history, proclaiming to people the teachings of Jesus that are teachings of returning good for evil, love for hate, love of enemies, etcetera, etcetera, and telling people what real war was. And what real war did to people, both during the battle and for 10, 15 years after the battle, and why it could not be consistent with Jesus' teachings. BBC made a television documentary on him. An article that was done on him was translated into 10 different languages. But here's the point. If way back in 1973, when God revealed to him a new light into the gospel, when the light of Christ shown in a way on the gospel that just showed him another dimension, if he wasn't open to it, if he didn't say yes to it, all those people that he touched would never have been touched. He wouldn't have had that new ministry.

And therefore what I ask of you during this retreat is to be the same way. To be very, very, very concerned with asking yourself the question what that is new is the infinite God trying to reveal to me, through the infinite reality of the gospel? It makes no difference whether you're 20 or 90, that's not the issue at all. Time means nothing to God. A person can have 5 days to live, 5 minutes to live, and God canÉ5 minutes if the person stays open. One time, the oldest person I ever had that made one of these retreats was a Samaritan brother. He was 101. But he came, and he was in great shape, and except for a little hearing problem, but he came and he listened and he stayed open. His life wasn't over. He knew that, that there was newness all over the place, that even though he'd lived 101 years, he hadn't begun to see. And if God wanted to say something to him, he was open to listening and to doing.

Now in this particular retreat that we're talking about here, our retreat, this weekend, we are talking about holy, holiness, the holiness of God, the holiness of the lamb who was slain.

SIDE #2

We are not talking; we are talking about the Lamb of God, because the Lamb of God is

Jesus.

Think about it just for a second. As a symbol, Jesus is not called in the gospel the dragon of God, or the rattlesnake of God, those aren't the symbols that are attached to Jesus. He is called the Lamb of God. What is it in the lamb that are the qualities that tell us about Jesus. What is a lamb, I suppose, is what we're saying. Well, first of all, a lamb is not a killer animal; it's not a lion or a tiger; it isn't a killer animal. It's gentle, it's meek, just to look at a lamb generates a sense of kindness in people. Secondly, a lamb, a lamb gives it's life for others, even those who are going to kill it. But a lamb never takes life. Never takes life. Thirdly, a lamb is a victim. We know that. Lambs are victims. But they are never victimizers. They are hurt, but they never hurt. And finally a lamb, when we look at a lamb, a lamb doesn't generate fear or terror. A lamb brings a smile to people's faces, because of its gentleness, its loveableness, an assurance that we have that it will not hurt. Almost a kindness.

Those are the realities of the lamb that we bring to an understanding of Jesus as the Lamb of God. He is not cruel. Jesus is not cruel. He is not a killer, he is not a victimizer, he is not a gossip or terrorist trying to hurt people. He is gentle, he is kind. And so, when we say behold the lamb of God, and not behold the dragon of God or the lion of God, or the rattlesnake of God, we are saying something awfully important. Why?

Well, let's look at the apparition at Knock. We are saying something awfully important, because we can become so used to a symbol that we can miss what's really there. We can miss all the communication coming from it, we can get in a little habit of thought that every time we stand in front of it we just think the same thing and nothing new ever happens to it, it us, even though the symbol is of infinite depth, even though it's of God. The apparition of the gentle, kind, loving lamb of God does not inspire fear or worry about hurt or terror, or worry about being victimized. The apparition of the Lamb of God obviously comes to Ireland through the power of the Holy Spirit for Irish people. It's that clear. It didn't come to France, didn't come to America or Venezuela or Japan, it came here. Something is being asked as well as given to Irish people by the apparition of the



Lamb of God. Irish people are asked to respond to it. Irish Christians, that is. At the most obvious level, the most obvious level, Irish Christians are supposed to bring the meaning, the power, the truth, the glory of the lamb of God back to the Irish Church, and perhaps through the Irish Church, the church into the world. For you know and I know that we live in a world, and the truth be told we live in a church, meaning Christians, where all those values that are opposite the Lamb of God reign. Not meekness, but cruelty, not love but terror and fear, not gentleness and kindness but hurt and victimizing people.

And so, the Lamb of God comes to Ireland. But, there is a reality that goes with the apparition. To be disciples of the Lamb of God in Ireland, one has to accept the grace of the apparition. There is a grace that comes with every apparition, because it's of God. One has to accept the grace to proclaim, by word and deed, individually and collectively as church, the truth of the Lamb of God, the truth of Jesus. Accepting the grace of the apparition, and this is the central sentence, accepting the grace of the apparition requires enfleshing it, not just adoring it. The truth of Jesus is not just to be thought about or argued about or even adored, the truth of Jesus is to be lived. Not those who say Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but those who do the will of my father, and who tells us the will of the father? Jesus.

Adoration is insufficient for salvation. The most used verb by Jesus in the gospels is do. The gospels are meant to be lived. Everything that God does in Jesus is to become infleshed in us when we see the truth of it. Prayer, adoration, study, reflection; these are all part of the process. But the end result is that we become different human beings, that we act and choose differently than we otherwise would have. In other words, in the New Testament, in the gospel, and we're talking about gospel holiness, truth is just not meant to be celebrated or thought about; truth is meant to be lived. And so everything is genuinely of the gospel comes to us, as does this apparition at Knock, comes to us with the responsibility of incarnating and enfleshing it.

We adore the Lamb of God because the Lamb of God is God, and only God deserves

adoration, no one else. No one else deserves adoration. Four times during a mass, the Roman rite mass, the priest refers to the consecrated bread and wine as the Lamb of God. This is the Lamb of God for the people. This is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. Or behold the Lamb of God. That consecrated bread, the technical word for, in, in, in formal theology, that consecrated bread deserves latria. Latria is a word that means in Latin, that adoration due only to God. That adoration due only to God, that is what we are expected to be in the state of before the consecrated bread and wine.

If you saw a Byzantine liturgy which you will tomorrow and the next day, immediately after the consecration, priest and people prostrate themselves. Prostrate :not genuflection, but prostration, which you do only before God. That's why there are no pews in the Byzantine churches. We adore the Lamb of God, because it's God. And we must adore the Lamb of God, because it is God. But also, we must imitate the Lamb of God because it is God. And because the lamb himself calls us to that imitation. Because the father himself calls us to that imitation.

I give you a new commandment; love one another as I have loved you. That is the imitation of the Lamb of God, Jesus. Of what use is adoration of the Lamb of God, if we go out from adoration, and we act like a rattlesnake or a dragon? Or all kinds of other things. The Lamb of God tells us how to live. Second to second to second. Said another way, the Lamb of God tells us how to be holy. And only the Lamb of God tells us how to be holy. We adore only one reality, the holy. That's why we genuflect in front of the Lamb of God, in front of the blessed sacraments, that's why we prostrate in front of the Lamb of God. Because it's the holy. We adore the Lamb of God, because the Lamb of God is the holy one, but we must also imitate the Lamb of God precisely for the same purpose.

Said another way, what does the gospel call us to. Let's say it very, very clearly, as shocking as it may be. The gospel explicitly calls us, day in and day out, moment in and moment out, to imitate God and nothing less. We are called to a life of the imitation of

God, the imitation of Christ, the imitation of the Father, in that he who sees me sees the Father.

Can you imagine what the consciousness is that says I will not imitate that which I adore. I refuse. What is going on there? How can we refuse to imitate that which we adore? Especially when we know that that which we adore has explicitly told us to imitate him. And comes to us, to give us the power and the truth to do precisely that? You know, one of the fathers of the early church, John ??????????????, he said, the test, the test of the validity of our prayer life, the test of the valid, of the validity of our prayer life was how much we were willing to labor on behalf of that for which we pray. The test of the validity of our prayer life is how much we are willing to labor on behalf of that for which we pray. And so, when we go into church as we kneel before the blessed sacrament, which by the way I think I mentioned earlier in the introduction, in the Byzantine church, the consecrated host is called the lamb, when we kneel before the lamb, whether at exposition of blessed sacrament or in tabernacle, and we know in fact that the lamb wants us to live lives of holiness, with him as the model of the life, to imitate him, and we refuse to labor for that, we refuse to struggle for that. We've got all other kinds of struggles. But that's one we will not do. What is it that's going on in us?

And what about the church, I mean the whole community? The church is the community of the Lamb of God. The church is the community of Jesus Christ. What of a church that adores but doesn't imitate. Let me offer you one suggestion of what the consequences of that are. Ever so slowly, the children of that church and the grandchildren are going to begin to believe that those who adore and don't imitate really don't believe themselves. Something is terribly wrong. Is it all the fault of those who are the generation and two behind us? Or have we put up some terrible impediments to seeing that that consecrated host is really God, and is one of the greatest, or the greatest impediment that we have put before people that does not allow them to see Jesus as the lamb of God, is that we refuse to imitate, to struggle to imitate the lamb of God. Individually, as personal Christians, collectively as church.

In the Eucharist, when we receive the Lamb of God, when we consume the Lamb of God, we must choose to consume it with the desire to become the Lamb of God. In other words, Saint Augustine says, become what you consume. That's the quote; become what you consume. It is not by accident that four times, immediately before communion, the church refers to the consecrated bread and wine, and wine, as this is the Lamb of God. Become what you consume. The Christian life is the imitation of Christ, the imitation of the Lamb of God; it is becoming the Lamb of God. It is becoming God. Refusal to imitate the Lamb of God is a refusal of holiness. It's a refusal to embark from the way of holiness.

Now you and I know that holiness is not a priority in this world. Wherever you look, north, south, east and west, whatever country you look at, holiness is all but irrelevant. There are little pockets of people here and there that are interested, but for the most part, regardless of what religion you look at, regardless of what society or culture you look at, holiness is not a priority. And so we come back to the beginning. Holiness is the revolution. Our nurturing is not in holiness through the societies we live in. Not if holiness means imitating the holy one, the one who is holy, the only one who is holy, Jesus Christ the lamb of God. Holiness is just not what surrounds us. Greed, lust, vulgarity, cruelty, destruction, anger, manipulation by media and so forth, all kinds of things surround us, but not holiness.

Our task, as Christians, individually and as church, is only one, and that is to turn from that and turn to holiness. And that way that is done, the way that turn is made is very, very simple. It does not take a doctorate degree in theology to understand it or to do it. The way that turn is made, is to day in and day out, moment in moment out, say what would Jesus do here? What would the Lamb of God do here, and do it. There is no other way to make it; there is no other turn, and that, that is authentic revolution. Because that is participating in the life of the holy, in the life of God. That's the stuff that changes history. That's the stuff that lets the fruits of the cross and resurrection of Jesus come into the world, to calm the flames of destruction that are going through Ireland. The simple moment to moment imitation of the Lamb of God. No Christian can refuse to

adore the lamb of God, without causing great damage to him or herself, and only God knows what damage is done to others that we should touch, when we refuse to adore the lamb of God. But likewise, no Christian can refuse to imitate the Lamb of God, without causing great damage to him or herself, or to those they were supposed to touch by their imitation.

And so, on August 21st, 1879, Ireland, whether it be Catholic or Protestant Ireland, or even Orthodox if they're any Orthodox in Ireland, Ireland was called to turn away, turn away from the ways of the world, the un-lamblike ways of the world, the ways of cruelty and violence, or victimization and oppression, of the sword and enmity, and was called to turn toward the gentle, the meek, the loving, the kind, the non-fearful lamb of God.

At a bare minimum, one can say Ireland was called to give up being just another gang among the gang of nations, living by gang values. It was called to imitate the Lamb of God. Why God chose here, for that apparition, why chose Lowell for the apparition of Bernadette, only God knows. But that God did choose here, and placed that symbol in front of Irish people, seems to me to be a most important reality for anyone that's born Irish.

And so, let us now conclude our evening by leaving here and going over to the apparition shrine, and adore the Lamb of God, the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament there. Perhaps when we're there, this evening, we can begin to ask God, to ask the Lamb of God, to give us the power and the grace, the courage, to begin the simple but essential step that is the way of holiness. We can ask the Lamb of God to give us the grace and the power and the courage to begin to imitate the Lamb of God.