

THE GATES OF HEAVEN ARE LIGHTLY LOCKED:
THE BEAUTY AND THEOLOGY OF THE MASS

These outlines are from a series of eleven talks Father Horkan gave at Our Lady of the Valley Church in Luray, Virginia. The title comes from a line in G.K. Chesterton's 1911 epic poem *Ballad of the White Horse*. In an early scene, the Blessed Virgin Mary appears to King Alfred as he is trying to gather English forces for one final stand against the Vikings. He says will not ask for a vision of heaven, for he is not worthy of it. Instead he asks her to tell him whether he will win that war and whether he will persevere in the faith to the end. Mary refuses to tell him the future, saying that the pagans seek "sure fates and fame;" but regarding the future "you and all the kind of Christ are ignorant and brave." Instead, she gives him something, better, the guarantee that Christ is with him, and that Christ offers him even now an unshakeable Christian joy. In that context, she says, regarding that joy from God, "The gates of heaven are lightly locked // We do not guard our gain." At the Mass, this promise is as real as anywhere on earth. The gates of heaven are open, the angels and saints join us, God speaks to us, and Jesus Christ is with us on this pilgrimage to everlasting life.