

Archbishop Lori's Address to the 135th Knights of Columbus Supreme Convention

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St. Louis, Missouri

August 3, 2017

I hope you'll agree – it's been a wonderful Convention. And it has been a special pleasure for us to be here in St. Louis, a city with such deep Catholic roots, a local church with a strong missionary spirit, an Archdiocese that is the Church's 'gateway to the West'.

During the days of our Convention, we have focused on the theme "Convinced of God's Love and Power." This means we believe that the God of glory and majesty – the God of infinite power and might – really does know us, really does care about us, and through his Son Jesus really does accompany us throughout our lives. And more than that, we believe that God's love is powerful – powerful to change our lives, powerful in overcoming our sins, powerful in changing our plans and priorities such that we no longer live for ourselves but for Christ and for others. And we have seen this theme – so fundamental to the Gospel – celebrated, preached upon, and exemplified in countless ways in the days of this, our 135th Supreme Convention.

Now it is up to us to take this theme home. It's one thing to come to a Convention like this – and to listen to the Supreme Knight's excellent and inspiring report, witness and take part in truly uplifting liturgies, applaud those whose hard work has advanced the good of the Order ... & much more. It's one thing to do that – but quite another thing to bring it all home – to reflect the spirit and content of the Convention throughout the fraternal year. Together with our Worthy Supreme Knight, that is what I am urging you to do.

Teresa of Calcutta claimed for her sisters the title, "Missionaries of Charity" – but, in a sense, that same title should apply to us as Knights of Columbus. We, too, are

called to be missionaries of charity. When Mother Teresa chose that name for her religious community in the late 1940's, she had in her heart a theme very much like the theme of this Convention. She was utterly convinced of God's love, utterly convinced of the power of his love, and utterly convinced that she and her new religious community were called not only to harbor that love in their own lives but share it. Indeed, she rightly believed that she and her sisters were sent to bring God's love into the world, to the poorest of the poor.

All of us are sons of the Venerable Servant of God, Fr. Michael J. McGivney. Before he was a priest, he was a disciple, a follower of Christ. As he grew to manhood and was formed for the priesthood, Christ's love and the power of his love, took root in that young man's life. After his ordination, he was sent to St. Mary's in New Haven as an Assistant Pastor. For the young Fr. McGivney, this was not just an assignment, not just filling a vacancy. Rather, for this parish priest, it was a matter of being sent. Fr. McGivney came to New Haven as one who was sent by his bishop - a missionary, an ambassador, an emissary of God's love to the people of St. Mary's Parish and to the wider community. His love was especially directed to the poor, the outcast, the widow and the orphan. In the language of Pope Francis, we could say that Fr. McGivney's field of vision included those people and situations that most of the society around him could not see because of spiritual blindness. Fr. McGivney's *peripheral vision* was sharp and clear!

But it was not Fr. McGivney's way to be the star of the show, to be a one-man band, to be the center of attention. Attractive as he was to the people of his parish and the wider community, Fr. McGivney set about empowering the men of his parish to become what we call today, "missionary disciples". He wanted the members of the Knights of Columbus to be strong in their faith, followers of Jesus convinced of the power of God's love, and to reflect that life-changing love in their own families, in their parishes, and especially with those who were in need. They were sent as missionaries, ambassadors, emissaries, not merely of their own charity and good will but of the overflowing charity of Jesus Christ - that love which alone is stronger than death and more powerful than sin. They were to be missionaries of that love which is at the very heart of God himself.

The whole point of the yearly Supreme Convention is to be confirmed in the

principles of the Order – charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism – but especially our first principle, the principle of charity. It is our duty to share the powerful, life-giving love that is at the heart of God, revealed by Jesus and communicated to us in God’s Word and in the Sacraments. Any convention is a success to the degree that the leadership of the Order returns home with a renewed and deepened commitment to the principle of charity – a charity that is expressed in the spirit of loving service which we generously extend to the needy and the outcast – to those who are on the peripheries of both Church and society.

Let us link the principle of charity to membership – to the urgent need of the Order to attract a young demographic – men in their 20’s and 30’s with young families, men who are part of the generation known as millennials. Many times, younger people are not attracted to institutions and sadly, that includes the Roman Catholic Church – at least, at first. Yet many are attracted to works of charity, to the service of others, and, at first, the external aspects of the Order may seem off-putting to many young men and their families. In the Knights they will find not merely an organization but indeed a fraternity, a communion, dedicated to charity, indeed they will find no group anywhere more dedicated to charity than we are. The more we live the principle of charity, the more attractive the Order will be – not only to younger men – but also to many Catholics who have strayed from the faith yet who are looking for some kind of an anchor in their lives. Through our charity, we can assist every parish in becoming not merely a stable unit in a diocese but a place of intense missionary activity.

Crucial to all of this is the promotion of family life – the efforts of the Knights to promote, defend, and foster the domestic Church. We are striving to help couples root their marriages in the love of Christ, to be convinced of the truth and power of God’s love in their lives as they face the difficulties and problems of daily life and embrace the challenges of raising children in today’s world. Many younger men are also looking for support for living in this confused world of ours as a virtuous Christian man, a man who knows how to pray and how avoid the pitfalls of things like pornography and indifference to loved ones. In reaching out to them, inviting them with a truly fraternal spirit – we are acting like true missionaries of charity.

It is also important that we act like missionaries of charity internally – in the way in

which we conduct the business of our councils – not lording authority over other brother knights but rather exercising authority in a spirit of service – with charity and consideration for all, with a spirit of integrity, with a spirit of reconciliation that goes the extra mile. Internal rancor and division undercuts our role as ambassadors, emissaries of charity.

Finally, I hope you will forgive me for looking ahead just a bit, for, as all of you know, next year's convention will be held in Baltimore, a city that is near and dear to my heart. You'll hear more about that in just a few minutes – but I just want you to know how proud and happy I will be to welcome you, the leaders of the Knights of Columbus, to America's first diocese.

It is a pleasure and an honor to serve as your Supreme Chaplain and to serve with our Worthy Supreme Knight Carl Anderson. Thank you for all that you do in service to one and in service to all. God bless you! Vivat Jesus!