

Archbishop Lori's Address to 137th Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus

Supreme Chaplain's Address

137th Supreme Convention Knights of Columbus

Minneapolis, MN

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Introduction

First, I want to express my own personal thanks for the warm hospitality of our brother knights here in Minnesota. Thank you for hosting a wonderful Supreme Convention. I also want to express my gratitude and yours for the inspired leadership of our Supreme Knight, Carl Anderson. His leadership, example, and friendship are a great blessing in my life, a blessing to the Order, and indeed a blessing for the whole Church!

The themes of our conventions, dear brothers, are always timely. They go to the heart of who we are as Knights and what is distinctive about our Order. They inspire us, you and me, to be better Knights as we go forth as strive to fulfill our roles of leadership and service to the Order, to the Church, and to the countries which we are blessed to claim as our homelands.

But this year's theme, Knights of Columbus, Knights of Unity, was especially timely. I say that because, as you have heard this week, the anger and polarization that are sadly so much a part of our culture now also are finding their way into the life of the Church.

When members of the Church and — God-forbid — the Order use anger and invective against one another, then, to use the famous words of Pope St. Paul VI “the smoke of Satan has entered the Church through some fissure.”

To say this is not to defend the indefensible. As we all know so sadly, there are

serious and abundant reasons for righteous anger, especially the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and the failure of some bishops to address this forthrightly.

Anger is justifiable when church leaders fail to lead – fail to communicate the fullness of the faith in love, fail to help form consciences, fail to evangelize the culture, faith in integrity – and the list could go on.

But righteous anger is not like the bitterness and vitriol we so often see today among so many Catholic commentators and among so many who engage in personal attacks on the character of others.

Nor is anger righteous when its purpose is merely to defend an ideology, be it of the right or of the left. As the late Cardinal George of Chicago famously said, “The Catholic faith isn’t liberal or conservative, it just happens to be true!”

Still less is anger righteous that employs evil tactics to attain its goals, specifically, the dual sins of calumny and detraction.

Calumny consists in making false and defamatory statements about others. Detraction consists in broadcasting actual faults of others for no good reason.

Winning an argument or making a splash in social media are not good reasons to muckrake, to search out and publicize the faults of people one disagrees with.

Some years ago, a co-worker brought me a print out from a Catholic website that made outrageous and outlandish claims about a brother bishop.

“I thought you should see this,” he said.

To my regret, I read it. It felt like I had ingested poison.

Wouldn’t it be a wonderful thing if we all decided to stop giving oxygen to people who, while claiming to be Catholic, denigrate others to advance their cause?

By contrast, righteous anger seeks not political or rhetorical victories nor does it ever seek the destruction of persons and their reputations.

Rather, in the words of St. Paul, it seeks “to do the truth in charity.”

In condemning evil, including threats to human life and dignity and indeed all the ways the human heart can betray the Lord and the Gospel, righteous anger serves as a wake-up call, a wake-up call that opens up the pathways of healing, redemption, and reconciliation attained not merely through human effort but through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

What I'm saying here is nothing new to you as fathers of families. When your children err you do them no favor by ignoring the infraction. But neither do you help them by exploding in angry, demeaning them, calling them names, and saying things you'll later regret.

What a difference when your children know that, on those rare occasions when you are angry, your anger stems, not merely from personal disappointment, but from a love that seeks what is good and true and virtuous, a love that seeks healing and growth not revenge and reprisals.

Knights of Unity

None of us singlehandedly can overcome the culture of hatred that has taken hold in our society and has gained a foothold in the Church's life. But as Knights of Columbus - Knights of Unity, we can make a difference!

In fact, as our Worthy Supreme Knight has said, there is no other organization in the Church or in society that is better equipped than the Knights to make a difference, and maybe even to turn the tide.

And so we rightly ask, "What can I do?" "What can I do in my jurisdiction?" "In my council?" "Among my family members and friends?"

To put the question that way is also to indicate the answer.

The most obvious thing each of us can do is to support the Order's civility campaign.

If you haven't already done so, send your name to Civility@kofc.org, and encourage others to do the same.

Most fundamentally you and I must put our own house in order, beginning with our

own minds and hearts that can so easily be overtaken by unrighteous anger towards others people, including those who have harmed us.

When that spirit of peace which flows through Christ in the Holy Spirit lives in us, then we are equipped to lead differently, not so much by the exercise of power but by persuasive attraction of goodness.

Examining our choice of words in public and private is a good place to start. It is also important to encourage brother knights to reject websites that offend against Catholic unity and posts on social media that are in fact anti-social. We need to be the ones who stand up and say, "Enough already!"

To be sure, our unity as knights is built from the ground up, beginning with individual knights and their families and our local councils. But we are also blessed to be leaders in a fraternal Order that anchors our unity, not in mere ideology, but in the faith of the Church - as St. Paul would say, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).

Programs like Faith in Action, resources for faith formation, days of retreat, studying Bishop Olmstead's exhortation on men's spirituality, "Into the Breach" and latest reflection on the spirituality of marriage, "Make My Joy Complete," as well as the consecration of our families to the Holy Family - these are important ways to anchor our unity in the hope that is ours in Christ, a hope which, as we heard just this morning, never disappoints us. Surely, this was integral to Father McGivney's vision for the Order.

So, you might say, we build from the ground up and from the top down and in God's grace we meet in the middle.

As our unity deepens, we are more and more equipped to influence our society. Polls consistently show that lots of people are fed up with the anger and division that runs rampant in our politics and what passes for entertainment.

As the largest fraternal order in the world and the largest lay Catholic organization, we can have a lot of influence on our society, on the culture at large, on our politicians, and on those who write and speak divisively.

We are Knights of Columbus! We are Knights of Unity!

It remains a great honor and a joy to serve as Supreme Chaplain of the Order. Not a day goes by without my praying for the canonization of our founder and for all my fellow knights and chaplains with whom I'm privileged to serve.

As this 137th Supreme Convention draws to a close, I pray that you and I will take the message and mission of unity forth from these walls to proclaim and live it to the glory of God, for the salvation of souls, and for the good of the Order!

God bless you and keep you! Vivat Jesus!