

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Divine Mercy Sunday Vigil Mass, 100th Anniversary Mt. St. Mary's Knights of Columbus Council № 1965

100th Anniversary Mt. St. Mary's Knights of Columbus Council № 1965

Divine Mercy Sunday Vigil Mass

Immaculate Conception Chapel, MSMU

Apr. 27, 2019

Introduction

As Archbishop of Baltimore and Supreme Chaplain of the Knights of Columbus I am very happy to join you this evening to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Council № 1965 here at Mount Saint Mary's University, the oldest college council in continuous operation in the entire Order. On behalf of the Supreme Knight, Carl Anderson, and in my own name, I offer you both my warmest congratulations upon reaching this milestone and my heartfelt prayers that, through the intercession of the Ven. Michael J. McGivney, this Council will continue to flourish now and in the future.

When Council № 1965 was founded, in 1919, the world was in turmoil. History's first truly global conflict, World War I had just concluded, a conflict replete with the horrors of modern warfare. In the midst of Europe's bloody battlefields, stood the Knights of Columbus. Its canteens were places of genuine charity, unity, and fraternity amid battlefield scenes of raw hatred, division, and fratricide. With its motto, "Everyone welcome, everything free," the Knights of Columbus demonstrated what it meant to put their Catholic faith in action with courage and generosity.

After the war ended and the fatally flawed Treaty of Versailles was being worked out, the courage and generosity of the Knights of Columbus found its way to what was then a small rural college and seminary in central Maryland, the second oldest Catholic college in the United States. Attracted by the example of other young men

who were already Knights, these pioneering college students saw to the establishment of Council № 1965, thereby implanted the Gospel principles of charity, unity, and fraternity firmly on this campus so venerable and beloved in the eyes of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Tonight we salute and prayerfully remember Msgr. Bernard Bradley, former President of Mt. St. Mary's, and John J. Casey, the Charter Grand Knight, along with 136 other charter members who set in place the foundations upon which we continue to build.

Through many years of tumult and change, this Council has survived and flourished. Just as the Mount itself-as also many other institutions-struggled in the Depression, so too it was the energy and determination of the members of Council № 1965 that saw it through those very difficult years. With the drop in enrollment due to conscription that occurred during World War II, Council № 1965 nonetheless continued to function - as it did in the years of sweeping change that followed that war. Throughout those years, the Council helped thousands of young men, including seminarians, to stay close to their faith, to develop habits of charity, and to support one another in a life of virtue, and in genuine love of country.

The Knights in New Times of Turmoil

As it beings its second centenary, Council № 1965 finds itself once again living through a time of rapid change and challenge. In a relatively short time, industry, economics, medicine, and communications - to name a few - have undergone dramatic transformations. The world is a very different place than it was even a relatively few years ago. But it also remains a dangerous place, for we are living in an age of terrorism and in an age of religious persecution, most often directed against Christians, as we saw in the tragic church and hotel Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka. So too it is an era when, despite our electronic connectivity, many people find themselves disconnected from faith, family, and friends and the country as a whole finds itself very deeply divided, perhaps as divided as it was on the eve of the Civil War. Not to be forgotten also is the sad fact that, in the United States, there are now more religiously unaffiliated people than Catholics and Evangelicals.

No one, including yourselves and this university campus, is isolated from these

trends. Nor is it likely that the clock will be rolled back to what we may think of as a simpler time or a better time – for every age presents new challenges. As members of the Knights of Columbus, we must imitate the example of those who went before us – those who responded to the opportunities and challenges of their day – by living the Order’s principles of charity, unity, and fraternity. In fact, I’d say that in our bitterly divided world that is increasingly forgetful of God, the mission of the Knights and of this Council is more necessary than ever.

The Message for Us from Today’s Scriptures

Happily, today’s Scriptures shed light on that mission which you, as brother Knights, must assume anew as a new century unfolds. What does the Risen Lord say to you on this Divine Mercy Sunday when you celebrate the past but contemplate the challenges of the future?

First and foremost is to be men of courageous faith. Think about this evening’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles. After the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles, they were bold in their faith and bold in bearing witness to Christ. They preached the Gospel even though they knew they were risking their lives and in bearing witness to Christ they brought healing and peace to many. So powerful was Peter’s witness that even those upon whom his shadow fell received deliverance from their sins and their demons. So too, our foundation as Knights must always be firm faith in the Lord Jesus, to whom St. John the Evangelist bears witness in today’s reading from Revelation. The Risen Lord must be for us “the first and the last, the one who lives” – the Lord of heaven and earth, the very Lord of history, and of our lives. We can’t afford to hedge our bets or to remain as “doubting Thomases”! Tapping into the Holy Spirit whom we received at Baptism and Confirmation, let us have a faith that is strong and courageous, a faith that bears witness to Christ by prayer, virtue, and good works, a witness that will prompt the un-evangelized and unchurched to reevaluate their lives and, God willing, to return to the Faith.

Second, this evening’s Gospel teaches us and urges us to live the principles of the Order: charity, fraternity, and unity. In that Gospel, the Risen Lord appeared to his astonished disciples and offered them his peace – the peace the world cannot give – and then empowered them in the Holy Spirit to forgive sins – to apply the mercy of

the Risen Lord to the sins and wounds of human existence – especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation – a sacrament we need to receive often. How does this apply to you as members of the Knights?

First, if we have received the mercy and forgiveness of the Risen Lord in confession, we must extend that gift to others by engaging in works of mercy – especially by serving the needs of the poor and vulnerable. Charity is not merely our personal generosity but an extension of the mercy which we've received in Christ Jesus, especially in the sacramental life of the Church.

Second, we recognize that all forms of sin undermine and destroy unity – unity in the Church and unity in the wider community. As men of faith who receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation worthily and often, we should have a keen perception of the power of the Risen Lord's mercy in our lives. The mercy which the Risen Lord offers us through his Holy Spirit doesn't merely wipe clean the slate of our souls – doesn't just absolve us of our personal sins – but also helps to reknit the bonds of unity that sin shatters. When we really take the Lord's mercy to heart, we will work hard for the unity of the Council and the Order but also for unity on this university campus and far beyond.

Third, encouraged as we are by the Lord's abundant mercy, we should not imagine that we can live our faith and bear witness to it alone. Scripture shows us how, even after Pentecost, the apostles supported one another and raised up communities in which people were free to love the Lord and to live their faith. For the last 100 years, Council № 1965 has been a source of fraternal support for thousands of young men looking to love the Lord and to live their faith – and in view of all the challenges that confront us now and in the future, it is even more important that this Council be a place of genuine fraternity – and an example of fraternity in a world that is far too individualistic.

Conclusion

So, on this Divine Mercy Sunday, in these days of Easter joy, I pray that this oldest continuously operating K of C Council will flourish, now and in the years ahead – by continually adding new members – by engaging in a charity that evangelizes – by being united in faith and service – and by promoting vocations to marriage and

family, religious life, and priesthood.

God bless you and keep you in his love! Vivat Jesus!