

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Saturday of the 7th Week of Easter; Knights of Columbus State Deputies Meeting

Saturday, 7th Week of Easter

Knights of Columbus State Deputies Meeting

New Haven, Connecticut

June 8, 2019

The Ultimate Change-Agent

In yesterday's homily, I spoke about our need for positive change in our lives – ongoing conversion and growth in virtue— so that we might worthily fulfill the offices entrusted to us by the Order. In my opening address, I spoke of the need for culture change, a change that represents an affirmation of what is essential to the Order and, in fact, is more deeply faithful to Father McGivney's vision. This morning, on the eve of Pentecost, I would like to speak with you who are called to be “change-agents” in the Order about the ultimate Change-Agent, the One who brings about all good things in us, namely, the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life.

When I was a youngster, it was common to speak about the Holy Spirit as the “forgotten” Person of the Holy Trinity. And even to this day the Holy Spirit goes unmentioned when we speak of personal conversion, the reform of the Church, and the renewal of the Church's mission of evangelization. Yet, it is the Holy Spirit who renews the face of the earth. It is the Holy Spirit who brings to life in us the Risen and Exalted Lord, such that we can say with St. Paul that it is Christ who lives in us, such that we are empowered to bear witness to Christ, such that we build up the Body of Christ by living to the hilt the three foundational principles of our Order—charity, unity, and fraternity. This morning, let us beseech the Holy Spirit to help us do precisely that!

The Centrality of the Principles for the Life of the Order

As long-time members of the Order and as its leadership, you know the centrality of these three principles in everything that the Knights of Columbus says and does. Yet, sometimes, isn't it all too easy to go about our service to the Order without explicitly referring to these principles? They are, of course, front and center in the degree ceremonials and in all authentic literature about the Knights of Columbus. But when challenges come our way, let us say when there is rivalry between prominent Knights in our jurisdictions or when two of our brother Knights publicly settle old scores, what becomes of these principles that we claim we adhere to? Are they just nice ideas, prominent themes, guidance at 30,000 feet? Or do they truly inspire, energize, and guide on the ground our conduct, decisions, and initiatives? Can we say that our lives are conformed to these principles, drawn as they are from God's holy law?

Clearly, these three principles are much more than nice ideas or themes. As I mentioned yesterday in passing, they are a summary of the Gospel. Fr. McGivney gave us three principles that sum up the spirit of the New Testament. Therefore, through the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives and throughout the Order, these principles should be both our inspiration and our guide in seeking to make the Knights more and more responsive to the spiritual needs of the men of our times and of the cultures that we represent:

Charity points to the God who is love, who sent his Son to redeem us of our sins, the God who is rich in mercy, the God who loves us more than we can imagine. Charity points also to our response of love, namely, to love God and neighbor and to express that love in deeds of generous service for one another and for those in our communities and beyond who are poor and vulnerable. Such charity is the measure of our allegiance to our Creator and Redeemer. Such charity is within reach of every member of the Order, whether rich or poor, whether in good times or in the midst of adversity.

Unity points to the union of love that is at the heart of the Holy Trinity; the mutual love of the Father and Son, a personified love, who is the Holy Spirit, and thus the mystery: Three Persons, One God. Jesus founded his Church as a communion of

truth and love, modeled on the Trinity, a Church that is one, holy, and apostolic, a Church that professes “One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism” (Eph. 4:5), a Church that is called to be “One Body and One Spirit in Christ” (Eph. 4:4). As Knights we are to express this unity at the heart of God and the Church as we invoke the Spirit to make us firm and steadfast in our unity as Knights. We are to express this spirit of unity by our common resolve to profess and live the one faith and to defend the Holy Catholic Church. This spirit of unity lives in our love and loyalty for our Holy Father, in our unity of purpose, in our common spirit of service, and sometimes in our exercise of holy restraint. In a divided world, we must remain banded together in the Holy Spirit. Fraternity also finds its origin in the Holy Trinity, in the distinction of Persons, three Persons in One Godhead, Three Divine Persons that exist in one another and for one another, bound together as they are in mutual love. So too in the Incarnation, Jesus, God’s eternal Son, became our brother. By taking on our humanity, he established a solidarity with every Person, as he entered human history to redeem our frail and sinful humanity. Thus St. Paul teaches us in his Letter to the Ephesians “to defer to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21). So too, in the principle of fraternity, the Order teaches us neighborly love for one another and for one another’s families, especially in times of need. The Order is a brotherhood that extends throughout the world. It is a solidarity that puts us on the side of those who are persecuted for the faith; that prompts us to defend the vulnerable to serve the needy. Truly as Knights, we see all people as brothers and sisters, and thus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we place ourselves “in service to one and in service to all.”

Living the Principles in the Power of the Holy Spirit

Yes, the principles are not mere ideas and organizing principles. They are, in fact, the foundation of the Order, but even to have said that is not enough, especially on the eve of the great Feast of Pentecost. Rather, as summaries of the Gospel they are to be understood, accepted, and lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. They are to be woven deeply into the fabric of our spiritual life and into the fraternal life of the Order at every level, such that each of us, and each jurisdiction, and indeed the whole Order is rooted in the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, such that our fraternity and unity are rooted in the love of Christ.

Thus the principles constitute our spiritual DNA; they must be hard-wired into the our decisions, initiatives, and interactions, first and foremost with our brother knights and their families but also with prospective members of the Order and those we are privileged to serve. In a phrase, a “critical difference” is to be baked into the leadership, membership, and indeed into all the activities and representations of the Order - making it different from the world around us and thereby making it attractive to men who need what the Order has to offer.

In his way, the Order continually undergoes the “missionary transformation” of which Pope Francis has so frequently spoken, drawing the Order ever closer to the heart of the Church whose deepest identity and mission is the evangelization, the avid spreading of the Gospel coupled with sound formation in the faith, leading to the sacraments and to a life of charity.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, may we open our hearts anew to discover ever more deeply and enthusiastically the spiritual brilliance and holiness of our Founder, the Ven. Fr. Michael McGivney. With his prayers to support us, let us pledge anew to live the principles of charity, unity, and fraternity for the glory of God, the good of the Church and the Order, and the salvation of souls. Vivat Jesus!