

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Knights of Columbus Mid-Year Meeting, Chaplain's Remarks

Chaplain's Remarks

Knights of Columbus Mid-Year Meeting

Washington, D.C.

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First of all, it is always a pleasure to be with, my brother Knights, to gather in the midst of the fraternal year to encourage one another in fulfilling the aims and goals of the Order. Please accept my thanks for your service to the Knights of Columbus and know of my daily prayers for you and for your intentions.

On occasions such as the Mid-Year meeting, we always take time to reflect on the principles at the heart of our Order, most especially our foundational principle, which is charity. But today I would like to spend a little time reflecting on our third principle, viz., fraternity, for we are indeed a fraternal order. The question is, what does it mean to belong to *this* fraternal order, the Knights of Columbus - and what distinguishes membership in the Knights from membership in other fraternal orders, worthy though they be?

Let's begin by looking at the ordinary meaning of fraternity. Dictionaries describe a fraternal as "an organization or order for people, especially men, that have common interests and beliefs." I think we Knights can see ourselves reflected pretty well in that definition but so can the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks and the International Order of the Alhambra. What sets us apart?

I think that the Knights of Columbus' notion of fraternity goes deeper. Our principle of fraternity is deeply rooted in the mystery of Christ and his Church. Let me explain what this means and why it is important. We have one common Father, namely, our heavenly Father. Out of love for us, he sent us his only begotten Son to be our Savior. Jesus came not as a visitor from a far distant planet; rather, he assumed our

human nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was thus born into the world 'like us in all things but sin.' In taking on our humanity, in becoming one of us, the Son of God thus became our brother. St. John Paul II taught that in the Incarnation, Jesus Christ in some way united himself to every person without exception. Those who are baptized and incorporated into the Church, however, truly become the adopted sons and daughters of the heavenly Father and thus become also the brothers and sisters to Christ, our God and our Savior.

Let's pause over the truth that when the Son of God became man and entered the world he united himself to every person without exception. This means that, by the very fact of becoming one of us, the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ, revealed more deeply than anyone else, the great dignity and worth that each person has in the eyes of God, especially the most vulnerable and defenseless among us, the unborn. Each person is called to the genuine friendship with God, each is called to become a son or daughter of the heavenly Father -and thus to claim Christ as their brother - and, as Knights of Columbus, we have a big role to play in helping others answer that call. So, we should never cease to marvel over this truth and never take it for granted: we are sons of the heavenly Father and because Christ is our brother, we are brothers to one another in Christ. And because Christ also united himself in some way to every person, we too have an obligation to reach out to others who do not share our faith but who do indeed need our friendship, our care, and our witness - especially in the areas of family life and charity.

This means that the ties that bind us together as brother Knights are far deeper than merely common interests and projects. Rather, we are bound to one another by bonds of faith - we share the same faith in God and in his Son Jesus and in the Church. We are bound together by our membership in the Church, a world-wide communion of life and love established by Christ in the Holy Spirit. And we were founded by a holy parish priest to be a fraternity whose first aim is to help us as men - as husbands and fathers - to deepen and develop our life of faith and to express that faith in acts of charity that manifest our solidarity with one another and with the whole Church but also with many others beyond.

We see this in the life and ministry of Father McGivney, do we not? Long before Pope Francis spoke about bishops' and priests' needing to acquire what he calls "the

smell of the sheep”, Fr. McGivney drew very close to his parishioners at St. Mary’s in New Haven. He was their father in God but he was also their brother in the Lord. He knew them by name. He knew their joys and sorrows, their hopes and dreams, the worries and anxieties. He was one with them in their tragedies and triumphs, and it was out of his pastoral solidarity with his people that the Knights was born. So he raised up men who would support one another in practicing the faith, help one another in their role as fathers and husbands, and provide a means of support for their family in time of trouble and loss. But his solidarity with those in need went beyond his parish. Again, long before Pope Francis spoke about ‘going to the peripheries’ – Fr. McGivney was standing by the side of a condemned man and in countless other ways bearing witness to the faith in the wider community.

His example sets the pattern for our fraternity – an example completely contrary to an inward-looking, closed circle, at best indifferent to recruiting new members and often beset by clashes of opinion or struggles for power. Rather, Fr. McGivney taught us to root our fraternity in Christ’s generous love that prompts us, as St. Paul said, “to defer to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21). It is a fraternity in which we truly regard ourselves as brothers in Christ and genuinely try to help each other to be both good men and good disciples of the Lord who are conscious of our solidarity with the needs of others, including those who are ‘beyond our comfort zone’ as Pope Francis often says.

That solidarity includes that who no longer practice their faith and as the number of the non-affiliated grows, this reality should be of the greatest concern to us – they are our brothers and sisters. Our solidarity extends to the unborn threatened with abortions, to families that are in crisis, to inner-city kids that need a warm coat, to young people competing in the Special Olympics, to victims of natural and man-made disasters, and to persecuted Christians in the Middle East, in Africa, and in Asia many of whom live at the point of a gun, many of whom are victims of genocide. Jesus has vastly expanded the answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor” – and the Knights of Columbus, every day, is responding magnificently to the challenge which the Lord has put before all his disciples. Ours is a brotherhood of holiness that puts us in solidarity with those in need – in our church, in our families, in our communities, and throughout the world.

As we approach the end of the year, let us take stock of our blessings. Our fraternity in Christ is one of the greatest gifts and blessings in our lives and so we should never let a day go by without thanking God and asking for the grace to strengthen our fraternity as also to extend it to others.

As we think about who we are as an Order and what we do, we have every reason to be proud of the Knights and every reason to go out and recruit new members. In a selfish, me-first world, we are an order founded on charity. In a time of deep and bitter division, we are an order founded on unity. In a time of fragmentation, isolation, and loneliness, we are one of the greatest fraternities in all the world. In a time when many call into question the goodness of their homeland, we are a patriotic order that keeps our eyes fixed on our true homeland in heaven.

I for one am proud to be a part of this fraternity with you, my brothers, and I pray that in the months ahead, we will persuade many others to join us - for the glory of God, for the good of the Church, for the good of our beloved Order -and for the salvation of souls. Thank you for listening! Vivat Jesus!