

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Knights of Columbus Pre-Convention Mass

*18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B*

*Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
Baltimore*

*Aug. 4, 2018*

## **A Word of Welcome to the Knights of Columbus**

Dear friends, this afternoon we are blessed to welcome the Knights of Columbus to America's First Cathedral, the Basilica of the Assumption: The Supreme Knight, Carl Anderson and his wife, Dorian; the officers and board members and their wives; Maryland State Deputy, Dale Trotta and his wife, Linda; Past State Deputy of Maryland and Chairman of the Convention, Steve Cohen and his wife, Vicki; and we welcome the leadership of the Knights of Columbus in the State of Maryland and far beyond.

Happily, the City of Baltimore was chosen as the site for the 136th Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus.

It is my joy and privilege to serve as Supreme Chaplain of the Knights of Columbus.

It is not just a large organization but rather, a family of faith, built on charity, unity, fraternity, and love of country.

My long association with the Knights has greatly strengthened me in striving to live my vocation as a priest and bishop and I am indeed grateful.

Let's give the family of the Knights of Columbus a very warm Baltimore welcome!

## **Two Priestly Exemplars of the Bread of Life Gospel**

Let me now invite all of you, dear friends, to see tonight's Gospel, on the Bread of Life through the eyes of two wonderful and saintly priests who were also brother knights.

The first is Father Michael J. McGivney himself, the priest who founded the Knights of Columbus in New Haven, CT, in 1882. The second is Monsignor Art Valenzano, the previous pastor of this Basilica. Let us indeed see Jesus' Bread of Life discourse through their eyes and then reflect for a moment on what their witness means to you and me.

### **The Venerable Father Michael J. McGivney**

The first priest, as I mentioned, is Father Michael J. McGivney, the founder of the Knights of Columbus. Actually, if we would give him his due, he is the Venerable Michael J. McGivney, because his cause for sainthood is underway, such a good and holy priest was he.

On December 22nd, 1877, in this Basilica, just a few feet from this pulpit, Father McGivney was ordained a priest by then-Archbishop James Gibbons.

These are among the words Archbishop Gibbons uttered at Father McGivney's ordination: "Vouchsafe, Lord, to consecrate and sanctify these hands by this unction and our blessing. That whatsoever they shall bless may be blessed and whatsoever they shall consecrate be consecrated and sanctified, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

Handing him the paten and chalice prepared for the offering of the Eucharist, Archbishop Gibbons said to young Michael McGivney: "Receive the power to offer the sacrifice to God and to celebrate the Mass for the living as well as for the dead. In the name of the Lord."

How those words of Archbishop Gibbons, spoken in the power of the Holy Spirit, pierced, transformed and set aflame the soul of young Michael McGivney.

He rose from this sanctuary, where he had lain prostrate, and went forth as preeminently a man of the Eucharist and thus a priest overflowing with pastoral charity.

With the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Charity, at the center of his life, Father McGivney offered his life to God and spend his whole life preaching, teaching, celebrating the Sacraments, engaging his parishioners, caring for them in their

needs, walking with them through thick and thin.

And in the process he saw the needs for a fraternal organization to help the men of his parish be better followers of Jesus, better husbands and fathers, and to enable them to continue providing for their families in the event of death.

Thus he founded his beloved Knights of Columbus. Truly, Jesus, the Bread of Life was the source and summit of Father McGivney's life; so too the eucharistic Lord must be at the center of our thoughts and affections, and his love for us must shape our words, our decisions, our relationships with others.

### **Monsignor Art Valenzano**

A second priest who had a tremendous impact on many lives is known to many of you, for he was the pastor of this very Basilica: Monsignor Art Valenzano, now home with the Lord for over three years.

When I came to Baltimore six years ago, he was the first priest I met. As I arrived at my residence, right behind this Basilica, I wondered what awaited me. To tell you the truth, I was apprehensive when I thought of the challenges awaiting me as Archbishop of Baltimore.

Monsignor Art put at ease right away. He was kind, he was funny, he was endearing. When I arrived he was watching the Orioles (we need your help Monsignor Art!) with two priest friends he called "the usual suspects."

Instantly, I felt as though I had always known him. What I did not know and found out a bit later was that Monsignor Art had been battling leukemia for nearly ten years.

Let me tell you what else I discovered about this priest who quickly became one of the best friends I ever had in life. He was a truly good priest, wise and loving, a wonderful pastor, who attracted people to Jesus, including fellow patients and his caregivers.

He loved the Knights of Columbus and was a wonderful Council Chaplain. Monsignor Art fought the good fight and even on those days when he must have felt awful.

He never ceased being cheerful, never ceased being a man for others.

But it was only in the last weeks of his life that I truly discovered what a beautiful priest Monsignor Art really was. When he was no longer able to say Mass publicly, he and I would celebrate the Mass in his room.

As he prayed the Mass and held the host in his priestly hands, I saw in Monsignor Art a complete identification of priest and sacrifice.

A priest who had given his whole life to Jesus and to his people – not looking for a miracle, not seeking his own comfort, only God's will, nothing else.

For the rest of my earthly days, he will remain for me the living interpretation of the Bread of Life discourse – O dear brother, may you rejoice in the great liturgy of heaven!

### **What about us?**

In the Gospel, we met a lot of people who came looking for Jesus because they wanted him to procure for them ordinary, perishable food in a miraculous way.

Jesus wants something more than that for us. He wants to give himself to us as heavenly food and drink, so that 'he may live in us and we may live in him.'

He wants to redeem us from our sins and to open our hearts to his Father's love.

It's easy sometimes, isn't it, to lose sight of what the Lord wants and instead become all wrapped up in what we need and in what we want.

We find ourselves asking the Lord for all kinds of favors and most of them are good and worthy.

But we learn from Father McGivney and from Monsignor Art that the greatest thing we can have in our lives is true intimacy with Jesus, eucharistic intimacy with Jesus, a true spiritual closeness in which our souls are not only nourished, but in which they become capable of loving God and others even more than we love ourselves.

For the only way to receive the Bread of Life is to die to ourselves – just as Father

McGivney and Monsignor Art gave their last ounce of strength in love of God and in love others.

Come, O Jesus, O Eucharistic Lord, live in us and take possession of us. Enable us to become a living sacrifice of praise. Then and only then shall we know the peace the world cannot give.

May God bless us and keep us in his love!

*Also see:*

Praise Jesus for Monsignor Valenzano

A tribute to Monsignor Art Valenzano

Georgie's Story: Choosing life when the prognosis is death