

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Opening Mass of the 136th Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus

Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit

Opening Mass 136th Annual Supreme Convention

Knights of Columbus

Baltimore

Aug. 7, 2018

Introduction: A Word of Thanks and a Request

Allow me to preface these reflections with a word of thanks and with a request.

I take this occasion to thank you, my brother Knights, your wives, and your families, for all the ways you encourage, support, sustain me and my brother bishops and priests in our ministries, even when the news is not so good, as is the case in these days and in days to come.

As chaplain, I have been strengthened by your faith and your love for the Church and as faithful lay Catholics you have helped me and so many bishops and priests in striving to live our vocations with integrity and love.

In the difficult and challenging days that are before us, may I urge you to continue working to build up and to strengthen the Church, especially by putting into practice the principles of charity, unity and fraternity.

I humbly ask your continued prayers for me, for all the Church's shepherds.

Please pray that we will find the path to repentance, healing and restored trust even as we place our trust in the pure and boundless love of Jesus, Our Savior.

The Hovering Spirit

This morning, our place of worship is adorned with a graceful image of the Holy Spirit found within the oculus of the great dome of America's First Cathedral, Baltimore's Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption.

This image has hovered over all those who, for more than two-hundred years, have worshipped the living God within the basilica's hallowed walls.

In this Votive Mass, the Spirit also overshadows us as we begin our convention. For, just as the Holy Spirit guided those who went before us in faith, so now the same Spirit of truth and love accompanies us who seek to follow Christ as members of an Order that is built on charity.

Those Who Went Before Us in Faith

How, then, did the Holy Spirit accompany those who went before us in faith? Surely the hand of the Lord was with those Catholic and Protestant pilgrims who journeyed in 1634 from England to the shores of Southern Maryland.

They journeyed aboard ships named the *Ark* and the *Dove* - names that suggest Mary's maternal love as the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Spirit imaged as a dove hovering over Christ at his Baptism.

Those settlers came here at the invitation of the Catholic Lord Baltimore who had received Maryland as a grant from the Protestant King of England, Charles I.

Among other things, Lord Baltimore envisioned Maryland as a place where Catholics and Protestants could escape Europe's religious conflicts and oppression and instead live together in freedom and harmony.

With the founding of Maryland, the seed of religious liberty was planted in this land; but it would take endurance, character, and unflinching hope for this seed to mature.

Events both in England and America conspired quickly to end Lord Baltimore's experiment in religious toleration and freedom.

Maryland Catholics lost their political rights and their right to practice the faith openly, a reminder to us of how fragile our liberties are, both at home and abroad.

Nonetheless, Maryland Catholics continued to profess and practice the faith and kept alive the promise of a land where religious liberty would be protected.

In today's reading from the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul speaks of the hardships he endured as an apostle. Those words of his also shed light on the afflictions, endurance, proven character, and, above all, the hope, of Maryland's first Catholics.

Despite serious flaws and blind spots, they persevered in their faith and they would contribute greatly to the formation of a nation which would strive to bring about "liberty and justice for all."

Those same Catholics, men and women of rugged faith and enduring hope, formed the core of this nation's first diocese, the Archdiocese of Baltimore, a fledgling diocese destined to play a crucial role in the organization and growth of the Catholic Church in these United States.

Indeed, in 1877, as the Church in America was coming of age, under the gaze of the Holy Spirit in the dome of the Baltimore Cathedral, Archbishop James Gibbons ordained Father Michael J. McGivney to the priesthood.

Only five years later, in 1882, Father. McGivney would found the Knights of Columbus, surely also a work of the Holy Spirit that has flourished and spread to many countries and cultures so happily and robustly represented here this morning.

The Love of God Poured into Our Hearts

Dear friends, whenever I celebrate Mass in the Basilica of the Assumption and gaze upon the image of the Holy Spirit in its dome, I do indeed think of how the Spirit accompanied those who went before us in faith.

This morning, gazing at the same image, let us ask the Holy Spirit to accompany *us* on *our* journey through life.

Let us ask the Spirit to impart to us steadfast faith, enduring hope and burning

charity, amid the challenges that arise from human weakness and from the world all around us.

For it is the Spirit who transforms our hearts by opening them to the Redeemer's love.

As we have heard, through Ezekiel the prophet, God promised to send his Spirit to cleanse our hearts from the idolatry of sin and to replace our stony hearts, so subject to self-deception, with hearts that are supple, with hearts that are open to the mercy of Christ, and open to the real needs of people all around us.

Ezekiel's prophecy comes to pass in the sacrament of baptism as 'the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.'

This outpouring encompasses the love which God the Father offers us in his Son Jesus, as well as the love which we, in turn, are enabled to offer to God and to others.

At the heart of our baptism is a vocation to love God and neighbor. And we are here this morning because we are convinced that active membership in the Knights of Columbus is a supremely important way to answer this baptismal calling to love, to unite in fraternal support in putting into practice the principle of charity.

In serving the vulnerable and the poor, we practice "a charity that evangelizes," a charity that, in spite of obstacles, opens minds and hearts to Christ and the Gospel.

Putting into Practice the Principle of Charity

If, perhaps, the foregoing sounds a bit too abstract, then let us turn to the Gospel parable about the talents. There Jesus teaches us how to live the principle of charity in a very practical way.

How should we understand this parable? How does it apply to us? Let me explain!

First, Jesus himself is the man who went away on a journey, that is to say, who died, rose, and ascended to the Father. Before ascending, however, the Lord entrusted to his Church, that is, to us, different gifts and talents . . . natural abilities, material

gifts and spiritual gifts.

All these were given in the measure that God knows is good for each of us. But the Lord's expectation is not that we will hoard them or misuse them. No, the Lord expects us to invest these gifts so as to turn a profit, and the way we invest them is by placing them at the service of others, especially those who are in great need, be it spiritual or material.

And what is the profit which the Lord is looking for?

Not a return on the dollar but an increase of charity!

This is what the Lord will be looking for . . . an increase of charity . . . when he returns in glory on the Day of Judgment!

This afternoon you will hear in the Supreme Knight's Report how, last year, you and your brother Knights, reached new heights in living the principle of charity.

He will demonstrate how you've placed your God-given freedom and gifts at the service of the Church's mission of evangelization and at the service of those who are vulnerable and in distress - the unborn and their mothers, victims of natural disasters, persecuted Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East, young athletes with special needs, those who lack adequate housing and water, inner-city kids needing a warm coat - and much, much more.

This afternoon you will *also* be challenged to live out as never before the principle of charity as the new fraternal year unfolds, reaching even greater heights "in service to one and in service to all."

Indeed, a tremendous challenge will be laid before you.

Just now, however, we stand in worship before the *Source* of all charity, indeed, the Sacrament of Charity, the Eucharist.

In this Mass the Holy Spirit will descend upon our gifts of bread and wine and through the ministry of priests, change them into Christ's true Body and Blood, thus linking us to the outpouring of divine love unparalleled in human history, the

Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, *the very Source of our charity!*

Let us open our hearts to the Spirit who leads us into depths of Christ's loving heart, striving to love others as the Lord has first loved us, as in our hearts we say: "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love!"

Brothers and sisters: *Vivat Jesus!*