

# Archbishop Lori's Homily - Feast of St. Blaise; Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

*Feast of St. Blaise (Optional)*

*Knights of Columbus Board Meeting*

*Naples, Florida*

*Feb. 3, 2018*

Way back when I was a seminarian at Mt. St. Mary's Seminary in Maryland, we were taught by an Irish priest who was brilliant theologian and liturgist. He was truly a wonderful man but could be a bit cantankerous. One year, when the usual announcement was made in the seminary that throats would be blessed on the feast of St. Blaise, this priest denounced the practice as a "medieval superstition." Being pious lads, we warned our beloved professor not to mess around with St. Blaise, but he dismissed us as theologically naïve. He was also promptly afflicted with strep throat. A number of us, his most fervent students, gathered round his bed and sang that ancient and venerable antiphon, "I told you so!"

I don't imagine that anyone of us doubts the importance of having our throats blessed through the intercession of St. Blaise. But might we not take a second look at St. Blaise himself to see what he teaches us about Jesus, the Good Shepherd and the Church.

A good place to begin is the Gospel where Jesus took pity on the multitude who came from near and far to see and hear him. They were, he said, "like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus responded to them by preaching the Word of God and curing their illnesses. As he cured them physically, they took heart and believed that he could also cure them inwardly. This is the faith-perspective we need to understand St. Blaise himself and the custom of having our throats blessed through his intercession.

Sources tell us that St. Blaise was a shepherd after the heart of Christ. Trained as a physician, he became a physician of souls as he ministered to his people in the

Diocese of Sebastea in Armenia. Even as multitudes went into the desert to be with Jesus, so too people flocked from all around to hear the Bishop Blaise preach and to be cured of their bodily and spiritual infirmities. Among those he cured was a young man on his way to prison who was choking on a fish bone – but that cure was just one of many. Like Jesus, too, St. Blaise would withdraw to pray, often in cave. But St. Blaise most resembled Jesus, our priest and shepherd, by his death as martyr. The Emperor Licinius, a rival of Constantine, ordered a persecution of Christians and by all accounts St. Blaise died a particularly cruel death. So, in all these ways, St. Blaise reproduced in his own time the ministry of Jesus – first for his own people and second, because of the communion of saints, his ministry is also extended to us.

Asked years ago to describe the Church, a noted theologian responded that the Church is Christ extended in space and time. Indeed, the Church herself is the Sacrament of our Encounter with Christ. The community of the Church, filled with the Holy Spirit, is the visible sign by which and through which Jesus continues to minister to his people. It is not merely group of like-minded people who reflect on what Jesus did in the past. It is not merely group of people who agree on moral or social issues. Rather, the Church – in spite of the sinfulness of its leaders and members – is both the sign and the source of Jesus' presence and power still active in our midst; and thus the Church is advance Jesus' ministry in the world today. So it is, that when a person is baptized, it is really Christ who baptizes. When the Word of God is proclaimed at Mass, it is really Jesus who speaks to us. When the Eucharist is celebrated, Jesus' presence and saving death are extended to us. When the candles touch us today in blessing, it is the touch of Jesus, he who is our light, our salvation, our divine physician.

This is how St. Blaise understood his ministry as Bishop of Sebastea and that is what you and I are called to do in our parishes, dioceses, and, most importantly for us, in and through the Knights of Columbus: to extend the ministry of Jesus in our world today – in ministries of Word and Sacrament but also in ministries of charity and service.

This gives us another take on our principle of charity: it is not merely the doing of good deeds, important as that is, but rather the extension of Christ's healing love to those who are in need. In a mysterious and humbling way, we who need to be healed

are also called to participate in and extend Christ's healing to our contemporaries, whether by our wheelchair program, our help to victims of natural disasters, the provision of compassionate pro-life services to expectant mothers... just to name a few of the programs of service we offer that extend the loving and healing touch of Jesus to others. Indeed, it was said of St. Blaise that people were attracted to the faith, even in a time of persecution, more by the bishop's deeds than his words.

This leads me, as your homilist, to examine my own conscience and it is also a point for all of us as the family of the Knights of Columbus to reflect on. We often speak of a charity that evangelizes - but what does that mean? Our deeds of service may indeed open the hearts of others to Christ and the Church and surely we should aim to do just that in all our charities. Yet, there is something deeper - when we're giving coats to inner-city kids, we're offering them also the love, affection, and respect of Jesus for the little ones. Whatever form our charitable service takes, it is Christ who acts in and through us - and thus our charity bespeaks the Gospel in a way that exceeds our capabilities. How humble, how grateful, how happy we should be that this is so.

Let us on this Saturday morning conclude by turning to Mary, the Mother of Church, and asking her to draw us close to her Son, Jesus, so that our words will be his word, our deeds will be his deeds. Thus we will be healed and thus we will be a source of healing for others.

Mary, Mother of the Church: pray for us!