

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord

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Mass for Knights of Columbus State Chaplains

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

Aug. 6, 2018

It is a great joy to welcome you to America's first cathedral, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Whether or not you've been here before, I think you can see that this is an extraordinary structure - extraordinary in its architecture, in its history and in its renewed vitality as a parish.

This is due in large measure to the good and holy priests who have led this basilica in recent years, including and especially its current Rector, Father James Boric.

Both Father Boric and I are very happy to welcome you this afternoon and have arranged for a tour of the basilica at the conclusion of this Mass as well as a reception in my residence which adjoins this venerable church.

Of special interest for us as Chaplains of the Knights of Columbus is the fact that our founder, the Venerable Michael J. McGivney, was ordained in this sanctuary by the new Archbishop of Baltimore, James Gibbons, on Dec. 22, 1877.

It was here that the then-Archbishop Gibbons uttered the prayer of the Church, imposed his hands upon Michael McGivney's head, anointed him with Holy Chrism.

Thus he transfigured his soul into a living image of Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest: Jesus, who revealed God's glory in and through his humanity on Mount Tabor, Jesus, who unleashed the glory of divine love in the world in the paschal mystery.

Indeed, it was here, in this sanctuary, that Father McGivney was ordained a priest to celebrate the Pasch, the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Charity, the Charity which is the heart and soul of the Knights of Columbus.

From the moment of his priestly ordination, Father McGivney dedicated his whole life to pastoral ministry. In his service as assistant pastor at St. Mary's in New Haven, and as pastor of St. Thomas Parish in Thomaston, Conn., Father McGivney put into the practice the exhortation which he heard from the lips of Archbishop Gibbons on the day of his ordination: "The office of the priest is to offer sacrifice, to bless, to govern, to preach and to baptize. Truly it must be with great fear that you ascend to so high a station: and care must be taken that heavenly wisdom, an irreproachable character, and long-continued righteousness shall commend the candidates chosen for it."

Archbishop Gibbons went on to say, "Therefore, dearly beloved sons, chosen [for the priesthood]: ...maintain in your deportment inviolate purity and holiness of life. Understand what you do, imitate what you administer Let your preaching be a spiritual medicine to the people of God and the odor of your lives a delight for the Church of Christ. May you thus build up by word and example the house that is to be the family of God..."

Holiness and Joy amid the Daily Demands of Ministry

In short, Archbishop Gibbons urged the young Michael McGivney his fellow ordinandi not only to avoid the corruption of sin and the pursuit of earthly glory, but, above all, to fix their eyes on Jesus, "the revelation of the Father's love."

In his life of prayer, his reverent celebration of Mass, his preaching, his long hours in the confessional, his nearness to families in their needs, his readiness to minister to the sick, the dying, the widow, the orphan and the outcast, Father McGivney did indeed keep his eyes fixed on Jesus and on the Gospel and was thus interiorly transformed "from glory to glory" as St. Paul said (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18).

Never did Father McGivney take his ordinary pastoral duties for granted. Rather, he fulfilled them with a holy fear that gave way to an infectious joy, a joy he spread among his parishioners and in the wider community.

And how heartened we priests should be that holiness and joy really can be found in the rough and tumble of priestly ministry, when lived with integrity and love!

Almost seamlessly, as an outgrowth of what he observed as an assistant pastor at St. Mary's in New Haven, Father McGivney went on to found the Knights of Columbus, rooted in the Gospel principles of charity, unity and fraternity.

As we all know so well, Father McGivney had two objectives in mind in founding what would become the largest Catholic lay organization in the world: First, he wanted to find a way to help the men of his parish to practice the faith more ardently so as to live their vocations as husbands and fathers more devotedly. Second, he wanted to find a way for those same husbands and fathers to provide for their families even in the event of their death . . . and the rest, as they say, is history!

The Ongoing Transformation of Our Lives and Priestly Ministry

Yes, Father McGivney's transfigured life and ministry are indeed a matter of history, not a dead history confined to the past but rather a living history of which we, who are Father McGivney's successors, are called to write a new chapter.

In the daily rounds of our priestly ministry and in our service to the Order, we too are called to participate in the glory of divine love which Jesus revealed in his humanity, "like summer lightening," upon Mount Tabor, a glory that was forever attained for us by his Cross and Resurrection, a glory that has passed over into the Church's sacramental life (Pope St. Leo the Great) of which we are the ministers.

How, then, does Father McGivney help us to understand what we do and to imitate what we celebrate - thus to attain the glory of holiness?

The answer lies in the principles at the heart of Order.

The glory shining on the face of Christ, the whiteness of his garments, the brilliance that is revealed in the Lord humanity is no earthly glory but rather the radiance of divine love, the love of the Father for his Son overshadowed by the Spirit ... a love so wondrous that it is stronger than sin and more powerful than death.

If our priestly hearts would be transformed from glory to glory, then let us examine them every day with regard to charity, not just at the end of life. And let us be agents of charity among our brother Knights and their families.

The glory of Tabor was also a glory of unity – the unity of the Father and the Son overshadowed by the Holy Spirit – “This is my beloved Son! Listen to Him!”

It was also a glory of unity with regard to the divine plan of redemption for Jesus was joined on the mountain by Moses and Elijah. However fearful and uncomprehending were Peter, James and John, they too witnessed this incomparable unity of which they themselves would partake.

At every Mass we pray for the Church unity and peace, so let us as priests and as chaplains be ministers, agents, envoys of unity – unity in the Church, unity in our beloved Order, unity in a fragmented world. Thus we dare to hope to progress “from glory to glory”.

The glory of Tabor was also a glory of fraternity, for Peter, James and John saw with their own eyes a vision of “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, & communion of the Holy Spirit.” Even if Peter’s desire to prolong the theophany – “it is good that we are here” and to dwell in the presence of Incarnate glory – “let us erect three booths” – even if these desires, under the circumstances, were misguided, they nonetheless point to a fellowship with Christ and one another that must prevail in our parishes, in our homes and in our Order.

If, in the frailness of our humanity we would participate in Christ’s glory, then let us be good servants of a holy solidarity in the Church of God, even in these days when charity, unity and fraternity can seem out of reach.

Aided by Father McGivney’s example and prayers, and by the maternal intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, let us then see our service to the Order and to our brother Knights and their families not as an additional burden, a further set of obligations piled atop ordinary ministry – but rather as a path to priestly holiness and joy, the wonder and joy we experience when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, as a lamp shining in the darkness. *Vivat Jesus!*

