

Cardinal Bertone stresses role of laity in keynote speech to Knights

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Catholic laypeople must put their faith into action by saying “yes” to Christ, said Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican secretary of state, during an Aug. 8 keynote address to the Knights of Columbus.

“This ‘yes’ is quite simply the ‘yes’ of faith,” he said, stressing that it is a “full, unmitigated acceptance of Jesus as Lord and our commitment to follow him as master and teacher.”

The cardinal addressed the Knights during their 125th annual national convention at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville, which drew more than 2,600 Knights and their families. The previous evening, Cardinal Bertone received the Knights’ “Gaudium et Spes” Award, the organization’s highest honor.

In his keynote address, he urged the Knights to follow the example of their founder, Father Michael J. McGivney, saying the priest understood that all believers, not just priests or religious, were called to put their faith into action.

Father McGivney “had a deep appreciation for the special characteristics of the lay vocation as being thoroughly immersed in the spheres of the family, civil society and public life,” the cardinal said.

He also said the priest made it his goal to “develop practical ways of ensuring that faith could be put into concrete action: especially by providing for the material needs of orphans, widows, the imprisoned, alcoholics, the unemployed and the destitute.”

But Father McGivney, according to the cardinal, also understood that concern for the poor and those in need had to be rooted in faith so that the charitable actions did not lose their deeper meaning.

This kind of active faith is also a theme of Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical, “Deus Caritas Est” (“God Is Love”), the cardinal said, adding that it is only by “living the

life of faith” – deeply rooted in knowing God’s love and mercy – that believers can love and forgive others.

He acknowledged that laypeople are asked to live out their faith “in the midst of an increasingly complex and contradictory world” and can be tempted to “compromise their ‘yes’ to God by diluting Gospel values and by placing limits or conditions on love of neighbor.”

The way for the church to succeed in being a witness to the Gospel, the cardinal said, is through the ability of bishops, priests, deacons, religious and laity to work together. For the Knights in particular, he said, this is most evident at the parish level with pastors, council members and parishioners supporting each other.

He encouraged the convention delegates to share their experiences with each other, especially about how to facilitate effective cooperation with bishops, pastors and parish staff members.

He also urged them to work to overcome any divisions that may exist, saying: “Take the opportunity to deepen your cohesion, since when this is lacking in a parish family or a local church the ability to witness to Christ in the larger society is weakened.”

The cardinal praised the Knights for their “enthusiasm and boldness, filled with hope.” He said these traits have always been characteristic of the group and “will no doubt remain at the heart of their apostolate.”