

Knights of Columbus States Deputies Mid-Term Meeting

Introduction

What a joy to celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints with you, the family of the Knights of Columbus. How welcome you are here in this Basilica, the 1st of our nation's Cathedrals, where, in December 1877, Michael J. McGivney, our beloved founder, was ordained to the priesthood by then-Archbishop James Gibbons of Baltimore.

This Mass also affords me an opportunity to offer a few reflections on the universal call to holiness and on the role of the Knights of Columbus in answering that call.

A History of Sanctity

All of us are praying earnestly for the Canonization of the Venerable Father Michael J. McGivney, our founder. What a joy it will be when he is raised to the dignity of the altar. How I like to think of him as a seminarian here in Baltimore. I rejoice every time I offer Mass in this sanctuary where he was ordained a priest.

When I do so, I pray for my own repentance, conversion, and growth in holiness; I pray as well for my brother priests in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and for my brother chaplains in the Knights of Columbus. May we be might something like Father McGivney who fulfilled his vocation as a parish priest so faithfully day by day, who spent himself working for the welfare and holiness of his parishioners, and for those very reasons founded the Knights of Columbus.

When I pray the prayer for his canonization, I think also about the saints and blessed of our beloved Order; we call them 'saints of service' who lived the principles of the Order heroically. They came from every walk of life - Consider, for example, the layman Leonardo Perez Larios who generously and lovingly took care of his sisters in their need; he would ultimately give his life in the Mexican persecution because he continued to serve Mass and share in the Eucharist; or think of Blessed Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, of Caguas, Puerto Rico, another layman, known simply as "Charlie" - Truly set ablaze with the spirit of the liturgy, he bore witness

to Christ at the University of Puerto Rico and let many university students to Christ. These are but a few examples.

The Four Principles

Saints have a way of summing up the Gospel with only a few words buttressed by the magnificent example of their lives. Father McGivney gave us four words: charity, unity, fraternity, and patriotism. We talk about those four principles, those four virtues, a lot – they are the soul of our Order; they make the Knights of Columbus who we are.

Think of them also as paths to holiness. If we root our lives in these four principles, we will soon find ourselves deepening our relationship with Christ who revealed for us the face of the God who is love, who is charity; we'll soon find ourselves seeking to be one with the Lord and with his Church, seeking fraternally the interests of others rather than our own, and loving our country while longing for our true native land, viz., heaven.

The Universal Call to Holiness

This weekend includes a tour of the St. John Paul II National Shrine in Washington. There you will see a room whose walls are inscribed with the names of those whom Pope John Paul II canonized and beatified – more than any other pope in the history of the church. It is astonishing. These are walls emblazoned with hope and joy.

The names are of men and women who lived in various times, who embraced various vocations, young and old, rich and poor, lay women and men, religious, the ordained. It is as if the Pope illustrated for us what the II Vatican Council teaches on the universal call to holiness: “Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state – are called by the Lord to that perfection or sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect” (LG, 11).

St. John Paul II said that holiness is “the ordinary measure of the Christian life.” “The Church”, he said, “is profoundly holy and is called to live and manifest this holiness in each one of her members.” He grasped better than anyone our need for mercy – a truly compassionate mercy that seeks to heal our spiritual infirmities, not merely cover them over. He understood that compromising the faith and watering down the demands of discipleship are not merciful but instead a betrayal of our

baptismal birthright and our vocation to love. He urged us to live the Gospel with consistency in our daily lives – in our families, our work activity, and in our relationships and occupations.

Pope Francis too reminds us that we are called to encounter Christ and to allow him to accompany us on our daily journey through life, just as he accompanied the disciples on the Road to Emmaus. As he walked with them, Jesus opened their minds to the meaning of Scripture and then revealed himself to them in the Breaking of Bread, the Eucharist. Once we have met Christ and fallen in love with him, everything changes: listening to his words of spirit and life, worshipping the Father in spirit and truth, opening our hearts to Christ in private prayer – we begin to take on the features of the Christ of the Beatitudes and thus to we become his witnesses.

Conclusion: Ordinary Lives Extraordinary Holiness

Let us not forget that holiness is attractive to people, even those who do not believe. How many university students were attracted to Blessed Carlos, how many in their weakness were inspired by the Mexican martyrs, how many encouraged to respect life by St. Gianna Biretta Molina how many moved to live the vocation of marriage and family by the Knights of Columbus family living down the street!

May our sharing in this Eucharist give us new insight, strength, and courage to lead ordinary lives with extraordinary holiness for the glory of God, the good of our Order, and the salvation of souls. Vivat Jesus!