

# Mass for Knights of Columbus State Deputies

## Introduction

Thank you, Worthy Supreme Knight. It is a pleasure to be with you this morning and to have the opportunity to congratulate our newly elected state deputies and to offer a few reflections and words of encouragement to all our state deputies, together with the Supreme Officers and Supreme Directors.

The first job of any chaplain is to pray. So my prayer for you and for our beloved Order is that the fraternal year that lies ahead will be filled with God's choicest blessings for the Order and for your jurisdictions.

## Baltimore

It used to be said to be, "You're from Baltimore!" and now it's said "You're from Baltimore?" Friends and family members have called to ask if I'm o.k. with the unrest and the extraordinary number of murders in the city last month. I tell them I'm alive and well and living happily in Baltimore. It is the joy & privilege of my life to serve the oldest Archdiocese in the United States.

I might explain it this way. Often, when a couple faces difficulties, such as the illness of a child or the loss of a job, the husband and wife grow deeper in love – so long as those difficulties are faced with deep faith and an openness to God's grace. Brother Knights, please pray for me that my love for Baltimore will grow ever deeper as it goes through what remains a traumatic time and as it attempts to face anew deep-seated and systemic problems, including a high murder rate, drugs, gangs, failing schools, lack of decent housing, unemployment, and a simmering mistrust between civic officials and the community.

At the root of these problems is a more fundamental problem, namely, the lack of a family structure. Only a very small percentage of inner-city Baltimore residents live in an intact family – that is to say, father, mother, and children. Often, it is the fathers who are missing in action either because they are in prison or because they are on the streets. The number of out-of-wedlock births is far, far greater than

children born into a home with a mom and a dad. Teen pregnancies are often the rule. So many young people are on the streets of Baltimore with no place truly to call their home.

Unless we address the crumbling family structure in our culture all the resources in the world will not cure our other societal ills. Years ago Senator Daniel Moynihan of New York put together a study that pointed out the fundamental role of intact families in addressing the problems and challenges of urban life. Yet government, by and large, has pursued anti-family policies in its social programs, by incentivizing out-of-wedlock births and now by the social experiment known as “same sex marriage”. We have to ask what kind of a world we are leaving to those who come after us.

Among the priorities of the Knights of Columbus is marriage and family. During the past year, for example, the Order has sponsored a program entitled “Building the Domestic Church”. It has been featured in Columbia Magazine and on line. This is not merely one program among many. It goes to the heart of why Fr. McGivney founded the Order: to support Christian family life in his parishes. He understood so well that when the family is broken up for whatever reason not only do the spouses suffer but also their children and indeed society itself suffers. As family life weakens in our nation and in our communities, whether because of social disarray or because of the willful redefinition of marriage, the social fabric of our nations is being progressively weakened. In defending marriage and family all the principles of our order come into play: charity – because only in homes that are surrounded by love do young people grow to their full potential; unity – because the union of husband & wife in faithful, fruitful, and perpetual love is God’s way of bringing children into the world and giving them a chance in life; fraternity – strong families with solid values strengthens the bonds of fraternity in both Church and society; and patriotism – because love of country prompts us to build strong families as the most basic unit of society.

So, while many solutions are proposed for systemic problems in cities such as Baltimore, in truth, no amount of money and no amount of social experimentation will solve such programs so long as family life is in tatters. Having supper at home one day a week dramatically lowers drug use and dramatically raises academic

performance but for many kids in the City of Baltimore having dinner at home with mom and dad is just about as far out of reach as going to Yale or Harvard.

Here's something else. You will be happy to know that the Catholic Church is deeply involved in the City. There are many city parishes; there are elementary and secondary schools; two Catholic hospitals serve the West side of Baltimore; there is a massive presence of Catholic Charities and St. Vincent de Paul, and many other smaller Catholic providers besides. Among those who are volunteering in our inner cities are Knights of Columbus, including food pantries, coats for kids, and much more. I am gathering all these providers together later this month for a summit to see how we unite in addressing long-standing, systemic problems and tune ourselves up to be better partners with other providers and with the city. There is much to do in my beloved city of Baltimore and I ask your prayers!

### **The New Evangelization**

Among the things I am trying to do throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore is to kick-start the new evangelization in all the zip codes found in the City of Baltimore and nine counties that make up the Archdiocese. In many ways, the challenges I face as a bishop are similar to those you face as State Deputies. Just as I seek to reactivate lapsed Catholics and to evangelize those who not really ever heard the Gospel, so too you come into office with high hopes that your jurisdictions will see an increase in membership and the establishment of new councils. You look ahead to a new fraternal year with the hope and expectation that brother knights and their families who have been inactive in the Order will reactivate their membership. You ask yourselves, who should be a Knight who isn't yet a Knight?

Let me go a bit further. My work as a diocesan bishop and your work as State Deputies is distinct but our work does not run on parallel but separate tracks. We are, in fact, aiming at the same goal: evangelization. The Order is based on four Gospel principles: Charity: God is love; love of God and love of neighbor; Unity: There is One God in Three Persons; One Lord, one faith, one Baptism; Fraternity: In Christ we are sons of the same heavenly father who are called to serve the one another and to serve the broader community; Patriotism: while longing for our true homeland in heaven we seek to create in our earthly homelands a civilization of truth and love. When you think about the fact that our Order is based on four Gospel

principles and that we were founded by a holy parish priest who sought to bring men and their families closer to Christ and the Church – then you take everything that is said to you this weekend about membership, about council development, and much more – and see all this as a work of evangelization – as a work of spreading the Gospel. The Knights are the strong right arm of the Church in many ways but the principal way is in helping the Church accomplish the mission Christ gave her: “Go teach all nations and make disciples of them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

And where do we start in the work of evangelization? Pope Francis has told us two things: First, that we must be missionary disciples, followers of Jesus who have undergone what he calls ‘a missionary conversion’. Second, that every organization in the life of the Church, whether it’s a parish or a school or a Knights of Columbus Council – must also undergo a missionary conversion – it must be wholly given over to the work of spreading the Gospel of Christ & bringing people into His Body the Church.

Brothers: to engage in this work is both a great privilege & a great responsibility. Again, I can tell you what it means from my own perspective as a bishop. It means that I must first tend to my own missionary conversion. As a bishop I could easily become so involved in running the machinery of my diocese, going to meetings, doing budgets, building buildings – that I lose a sense of mission. Rather, it is my staying close to the Lord, by accepting the mission to spread the Gospel anew every morning, relying on the grace of the Holy Spirit, and by examining my conscience – that I shift from being a manager to a missionary... and I can tell you that the shift is not always comfortable. The same thing could happen to you. It is easy enough, I would imagine, to become so involved in the machinery and, dare I say it, the politics of your jurisdictions that little time is left to infuse the districts and councils entrusted to you with the Gospel spirit of the Order’s four principles and to reach out to those men who need to be Knights of Columbus.

Even when we’re convinced about the need to under a missionary conversation, making the shift from manager to missionary—you might say – you will meet some pretty stiff headwinds. Let me again compare what I face with what you face. Not too long ago, I gave a talk on evangelization at a parish and I took questions and

comments afterwards...and one of them went like this: "Archbishop, if we reach out to all those people who aren't coming to Church and then they actually start showing up on Sunday and getting involved, we won't recognize our parish anymore; it'll change. We like what we have. We paid for this church. We want to keep it the way it is." If that were the attitude of the Apostles they never would have left the upper room! The Church is not a club but the Body of Christ who wants everyone to be saved. Yet, isn't that true of at least some of our Councils: they are made up of old friends and old friendships are a great thing but it's not such a great thing when new members aren't welcome, when a Council says, in effect, "We build this and paid for it; we like it as it is!" When a people come to a parish church on Sunday, are they welcomed? When men get interested in the Order, are they welcomed?

Similarly, many of our members may not feel comfortable or equipped to talk to others about coming back to the faith or even joining the Order. Most of us don't want to be thought of as religious zealots and often the culture in which we live puts a damper on talking about religion. Some of our members recruit by way of their good example, by living the principles on which the Order is based. But what's true of a parish is true of you: In every parish there has to be parishioners trained and equipped to reach out beyond the parish walls to inactive or alienated Catholics and others, to invite them to be a part of the Body of Christ. In every jurisdiction of the Order there has to be Knights who are trained and equipped to reach out to inactive Knights or those men and their families who ought to be a part of the Order.

## **Your Chaplains**

Let me finally put in a good word for your State, District, and Council Chaplains. Father McGivney our founder was a priest and the four principles of the Order find their source in the Eucharist which he and his successors continue to celebrate every day. For the Order to grow and flourish, it has to be anchored in the Mass which the II Vatican Council calls "the source and summit of the Christian life". In addition to celebrating Mass, however, your chaplains are expected to help you and your co-workers in doing the work of evangelization: in helping form men in the faith of the Church and in their relationship with Christ; in helping form men who are better men and better Christians; in helping men to be better husbands, fathers, and yes, priests.

One place to start is Mass attendance. Sadly, in many places, Sunday Mass attendance hovers at about 20%. We need to ask ourselves as Knights – are our members at Mass on Sunday? Father McGivney required his Knights to be “practical Catholics” – or as we might say, “practicing Catholics” – and if he were here he’d tell us that means going to Mass every Sunday. Working with your chaplains, you can do a lot to encourage every Knight of Columbus family in your jurisdiction to be at Mass on Sunday. I think that’s key to growing the Order. I think that’s key to attracting the interest of pastors who might be sitting on the fence when it comes to the Order. We must be present to win!

### **Year of Mercy**

Brothers, the months ahead are going to be quite interesting – with the World Meeting of Families and the Papal Visit. But as you look down the road at the fraternal year, let’s not forget that the Pope has called for an extraordinary holy year dedicated to the gift of God’s mercy. Indeed, Pope Francis has called Jesus “the face of God’s mercy”. When many people become convinced of God’s mercy, then they are ready to take the step of reentering the Church. That’s true of many of our brother Knights and their families. I hope you will promote this wonderful initiative in your jurisdictions. As the Holy Father commissions and sends forth “missionaries of mercy” let us see what we can do to support this wonderful pastoral initiative.

On behalf of my brother bishops, let me conclude with a warm word of thanks to you and to all my brother Knights for all you are and all you do in the life of the Church. May God continue to bless our beloved Order and bless each of you as lead your jurisdictions along the path of charity, unity, fraternity, and patriotism. Vivat Jesus!