

# Memorial of St. Boniface

## Introduction

St. Boniface was a natural leader. He was well-educated, well-connected and everyone thought he would stay in his native England to pursue a promising career as a churchman. If he had stayed, there is little doubt he would have succeeded yet his name would have been all but lost to history. Had he chosen the road more travelled, chances are we would not know anything about him.

Thankfully he chose “the road less traveled” and we know plenty. In summary form what we know is this: sometime during the eighth century, he left home and hearth. He went to what is present-day northern Germany to preach the Gospel. Suffice it to say that in those days Germany was not Europe’s leading economy. It was, on the contrary, a tribal land where brigands roamed. Boniface rose to the occasion. His preaching was attractive and persuasive. With few resources, he re-established the Church where once it was strong and where lately it had faded from view... so much so that he wrote home to England asking for books, vestments, and money. What’s more, he was an answer to prayers for the few abbots, abbesses, priests, and faithful in that land who had kept the faith against all odds. He gave them, we might say, a new lease on life. To echo the Gospel, he was a good shepherd.

Using Pope Francis’ terminology we might say that Boniface was a missionary disciple. He was not only learned and skilled, he was holy and zealous, and that’s a potent combination. You could even say that Boniface re-founded the Church in Germany, which is to say, he re-evangelized it. When he was martyred in the year 754, the Church had strong roots in Germany, its roots had sunk deep into the soil and the imagination of that land. Indeed those roots were watered by the blood of St. Boniface.

## And You May Be Asking ...

Dear brother Knights about to be installed as State Deputies, you may be asking what in the world does an eighth century missionary bishop have to do with a new class of State Deputies here in New Haven ready to receive the jewels of office and ready to begin a new fraternal year. If the answer were, “nothing”, this homily would, of course, be over; so you know the answer must be that you have plenty to

do with Boniface and Boniface has plenty to do with you.

Well, let's begin with being a natural leader, for that is a very obvious fact about Boniface' life. I wish I know all of you personally but even now I'm willing to bet that your brother knights saw leadership qualities in you. After all, they chose you to lead your jurisdictions. They are counting on you as leaders to advance the Order.

Then, let's look at something as basic as membership. When Boniface went to Germany, membership in the Church had dwindled. Boniface greatly increased the number of believers, and he did so because he believed deeply in the Lord, loved the Lord dearly, and bore witness to him at the price of his own blood. Your wives are hoping that things won't go quite that far with you but there are definitely parallels. Pope Francis is urging you as a baptized Catholic to be a missionary disciple. Venerable Father Michael McGivney is urging you not just to be a practicing Catholic but an avidly practicing Catholic who takes your faith to heart and lives it daily and as a member of the Order. All of us are hoping that you will proclaim the four Gospel principles of the Order - charity, unity, fraternity, and patriotism - and lead many to join the Order so as to be good Catholics, good husbands, good and loving followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, let's look at bringing the spirit of the Gospel to your jurisdictions. When Boniface arrived in Germany the spirit of the Gospel was all but dead. It lived on in the hearts of a chosen few but it had no effect in the lives of the nominally Christian. We can see a parallel with today's society. Many people in our times have put Jesus & the Gospel at the margins of their lives. Unfortunately, in many lives, Jesus, the Gospel, and the Church have been banished. A recent Pew Foundation study showed that Catholicism is losing members more rapidly than other Christian denominations. We can't assume any leadership position in an organization that is "the strong right arm of the Church" - without being concerned about that. After all, our founder, Father McGivney, wanted the Knights to support Catholic men in knowing, loving, and living their Catholic faith. As State Deputies you need to ask the same question diocesan bishops do: Who's living in my territory that needs to hear the Gospel? Who needs to be reconnected with the Church? Can the Knights play a role in this?

And while you're thinking about the Church at large, think also about the presence of the beloved Order. Do you represent a jurisdiction where once the Order was strong but where it has lately begun to fade? Are there ways that the Order can make inroads into parishes and dioceses that are seeking to be re-evangelized? How many men are looking for support in living their faith and their vocations as Christians husbands and fathers, or their vocations to become priests? What are the roadblocks? St. Boniface was good at removing roadblocks to the progress of the Gospel; with his intercession and example, we should be good at that too.

## **Conclusion**

As we look ahead to the Convention and to the fraternal year, I pray that in spite of every challenge you may face you may fulfill your baptismal calling to bear witness to the Gospel, that you may be a faithful and effective leader in the Order, and that your service as State Deputy may bear abundant fruit, for the Order, for the Church, and for the world.

God bless you and keep you always in His love. Vivat Jesus!