

Solemnity of Christ the King 2016; Knights of Columbus Mid-Year Meeting

I. Introduction

A. This morning, in Rome, Pope Francis concluded the Year of Mercy; here in Orlando, in closest union with the Successor of Peter, we, the family of the Knights of Columbus, also conclude the Year of Mercy.

B. We do so with deep gratitude to God, the Father of Mercies, for the many graces and favors received during this extraordinary Jubilee Year. We reflect on God's patience and lovingkindness in forgiving our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We think of the indulgences we have been granted to assist us in repairing the lingering damage done us even by those sins that have been forgiven. We give thanks for the grace of receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, aware that in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar the very Incarnation of God's Mercy enters our inmost being. Let us also give thanks for the graces by which we were enabled to perform the spiritual and corporal works of mercy - extending to others the same mercy that the Lord has lavished on us. Yes, the Year of Mercy has filled us with gratitude and with hope that God's mercy will triumph in our personal lives and in our families, in our beloved Order and in our Church, in our nation and throughout the world.

II. The King of Mercy

A. And, for that reason, we come before Christ the King with humble, heartfelt homage. For, Jesus Christ is the King of Mercy and his is a Kingdom of Mercy. The coming of his reign was foretold by King David who was called by God to shepherd his People, Israel. The purpose of his reign was proclaimed by the Apostle Paul, namely, "to reconcile all things" and "to make peace by the blood of his Cross." The utter accessibility of this Kingdom of Mercy is revealed by Christ Crucified who

forgave the repentant thief when he said, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

B. So, as we, the family of the Knights of Columbus, pay our homage to Christ the King, let our eyes be opened more widely to the meaning of this Kingdom of Mercy. How do we to live in the Kingdom of Mercy amid our daily cares and preoccupations? I would suggest that the foundational principles of our Order provide a lens for understanding the meaning of Christ’s Kingdom and our part in it.

III. A Kingdom of Charity

A. For the Kingdom of God is first and foremost a kingdom of charity. We are in the hands of a merciful Savior, in the hands of the Triune God who is love, and we, who are limited and sinful, experience God’s charity towards us as mercy.

B. Father McGivney made charity the cornerstone of the Knights of Columbus. We are founded on God’s merciful love for us and on the works of charity and mercy we are called to do for others. As a priest who modeled his life on the Good Shepherd, Father McGivney connected the men of his parish to the practice of the faith because he knew they needed to experience God’s mercy if they would be good husbands and fathers. He also sought to ensure that the divine mercy received in the Sacraments would be translated into works of mercy for the widow, the orphan, and to all those who are vulnerable and in need. May Father McGivney’s vision live on in us as we seek to attract young men and their families to the Order so that they might be a part of Christ’s kingdom of charity and mercy. Let us lead by example, opening our hearts to Christ’s merciful love in prayer, allowing that love to be applied sacramentally to the wounds of existence, and then, in our turn, extend God’s merciful and healing love to others. God’s mercy must triumph over our sins, reign in our hearts, and shape every relationship and decision in our lives.

IV. A Kingdom United in Holiness

A. The second principle of our Order is unity and how beautiful is the unity that characterizes the kingdom of Christ’s merciful love. It is a kingdom united in the holiness of charity. Jesus taught us this when he prayed for us to heavenly Father:

‘may they be one, Father, as we are one, so that the world may believe.’ Paul teaches us this when he proclaims Christ as head of his body the Church . . . the source of reconciliation, the source of our peace, the source of our oneness, for God’s merciful love not only diffuses itself, it also unites, it brings together. On earth, the saints sought to overcome division and to unite people in Christ’s love.. In heaven, the saints are united in holiness as they behold the God of love face to face. In heaven there is no division, no rancor, and no egoism; all are in one in love of God.

B. We can be part of the joy and glory of the saints by embracing the principle of unity. For just as Jesus sent his disciples out two by two, so it is that we support one another in the pursuit of holiness and in the doing the works of charity that distinguish our Order. By our unity with one another, we contribute to the unity of the Church. When we are united in faith and in pursuit of holiness, we help to make the Gospel believable in our secular world. What’s more, we can be a model and source of unity in our divided culture: by our unity of prayer, our united efforts to promote the family, our common commitment to the distinctiveness of our Catholic faith, our oneness in devotion to Mary, and our unity with our bishops and priests for whom we are a source of strength.

V. A Fraternal Kingdom

A. Now, when we speak of unity of God’s Kingdom, we do not mean to say that the individuality of the saints is lost or absorbed. Each of the saints and each one of us unique, each life is a unique and unrepeatable gift from him who is the King of Creation. The gift of individuality is not rescinded but enhanced as each saint is fully alive in the vision of that divine glory which is also self-giving love. And so it is, that the saints are united not only in the love of God but also in love for one another, from the greatest to the least. Christ’s Kingdom, then, is the brotherhood and sisterhood of the redeemed.

B. As members of the Knights of Columbus, we aspire to that blessed state, by living our third principle, the principle of fraternity. Pope Benedict helps us see what it means to live our principle of fraternity when he says that “love of God is revealed in responsibility for others” (Spe Salvi, № 28). Thus we extend ourselves in love and concern for fellow knights and their families, and thus we seek to bring a swift end

to any conflicts that may divide us. We concentrate instead on serving the needs of others – the unborn, the disabled, veterans, young people, struggling families, victims of genocide, those suffering in the aftermath of a natural disaster – As we do all this and much, much more, we are making ourselves fit, acceptable, for the fraternity of the redeemed where Christ our King is all in all.

VI. Christ's Kingdom in Exile

A. We conclude this reflection with a word about love of country. Throughout, we have spoken of our native country, heaven, when Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father, reigns in the glory of his love. It is that truest of homelands for which we long, even if we do cling tenaciously to our earthly homes. Yet, as our eyes of faith behold that kingdom of truth and life, holiness and grace, justice love, and peace – we also understand better the task that is ours in this world.

B. Our principle of patriotism spurs us on to love our native land on earth so much that we bring to bear upon it the truths and values that flow from the Kingdom of Mercy, the Kingdom of the Beatitudes. For Christ, the King of Love and Mercy, must reign both in heaven and on earth and we must be his agents in shaping a world that is just and peaceful. As we look out upon a world torn by violence, persecution, and nations riven by political conflict and lack of respect for human dignity and religious freedom, let us ask for the grace to be those instruments by whom all things are restored in Christ, to the glory of his name, he the King of glory, he the King and Shepherd of Mercy. Vivat Jesus!