

**The Fifteenth Sunday of the Year (A)
100th Anniversary of the Knights of Columbus Council 1580
July 9, 2011**

**St. Paul Church
Highland, Illinois**

**+ Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, deacons, consecrated men and women, worthy Sir Knights, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: the Venerable Father Michael J. McGivney founded the Knights of Columbus to help “all who follow [Christ] reject what is contrary to the gospel.”¹ He saw the difficulties and hardships that his parishioners experienced on a daily basis and, knowing that the hearts of the men of his parish could all too easily become hardened, he formed a group of men trusting “the seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest” (Luke 8:8).

We know that this “seed is the word of the God” and that “Christ is the sower.”² Christ comes, then, sowing himself, and he does so freely and with great generosity, for the seed falls on the path, on the rocks, among the thorns and on the rich soil, each representing a disposition of the soul. In this action of liberality we

¹ Collect, The Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time.

² Alleluia Verse, The Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time.

see an unmistakable sign of his abundant love for humanity and his desire that we bear a fruitful harvest (cf. Matthew 13:23).

Saint John Chrysostom tells us that “the sower frequently goes forth for some other act also, either to plow, or to cut out the evil herbs, or to pluck up thorns, or to attend to some such matter.”³ In each of these tasks Christ the Sower does not work alone; he calls others to sow the seed with him and tells us to “ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest” (Matthew 9:38). Because the harvest includes all of humanity, new sowers are needed in every generation, and to this cultivation of vocations, you, my brother Knights, have shown yourselves to be most supportive.

Your founder cooperated with the Lord to sow the seed of the Word of God. Of him it could rightly be said: “Thus you have prepared the land: drenching its furrows, breaking up the clods, softening it with showers, blessing its yield” (Psalm 65:11). It is to this same work that Father McGivney calls each of you.

You, dear Knights, are also called to join in the Lord’s work of sowing the seeds of the Word of God and of preparing souls to

³ Saint John Chrysostom, *The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 44.4.*

receive it. This you seek to do through your commitment to charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism in service to one and in service to all.

If you are to be fellow workers in the Lord's fields you must first receive the seed sown by the Lord; you must let it take root in your heart; you must let it grow and bear abundant fruit in your life; you must allow the Lord to continually walk amidst the field of your soul, plowing and plucking, drenching and blessing, as he will.

Just as the soil cannot prepare itself to receive the seed, neither can we prepare ourselves to receive the seed of the Word of God, for "the preparation of man for the reception of grace is already a work of grace," yet "God's free invitation demands man's free response."⁴ It is the Lord's work, not ours. This realization is a source of great comfort and hope; the labor does not rely solely on our shoulders. As we seek to work with the Lord cultivating souls for the seed, we must remember this and not grow discouraged when it seems our efforts bear little fruit. We must do what is ours to do; we cannot force anyone to cooperate with God's grace.

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2001-2002.

The fact that the Lord sows the seed everywhere shows us that “when anyone has zeal and eagerness, there will be given to him on God’s part all things sufficient for his needs. But if he lacks any responsiveness and is not ready to contribute his own share, neither are God’s gifts bestowed.”⁵ Some may say here that “the Lord’s way is unfair,” but we do this ourselves (Ezekiel 18:25). “When we see someone listening carelessly and when with much effort we cannot persuade him to listen at all, then it remains for us to be silent. For if we continue, even his carelessness will be aggravated. But for someone who is striving to learn, we lead on and pour in much.”⁶

If we are to receive the seed he sows, if we are to hear the word and understand it, we must spend time each day in prayer and meditation with the Scriptures, reading them always with the mind of the Church. Saint Paul tells us that “we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). Yes, we groan because in the seeds sown among us we have received a foretaste of the glory of heaven and we long for it

⁵ Saint John Chrysostom, *The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 45.1.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

and desire it, even if we do not always follow our longing by putting our faith in action.

We groan because we struggle against our attachments to sin; we want to reject what is contrary to the Gospel and are strengthened in this struggle by the Word of God. If we are to be victorious in this struggle we must engage in prayer and works of charity. We know this and yet we still do not always do what is necessary; for this reason we groan.

We are often hesitant to spend more time in prayer or to live our faith more fully and publicly because we are afraid to lose something. Saint Jerome asks us:

Do you dread poverty? Christ calls the poor blessed. Does toil frighten you? No athlete is crowned but in the sweat of his brow. Are you anxious as regards food? Faith fears no famine. Do you dread the bare ground for limbs wasted with fasting? The Lord lies there beside you. Do you recoil from an unwashed head and uncombed hair? Christ is your head. Does the boundless solitude of the desert terrify you? In the Spirit you may always walk in paradise. Do but turn your thoughts there and you will be no more in the desert. Is your skin rough and scaly because you no longer bathe? He that is once washed in Christ has no need to wash again. To all your objections the apostle gives this one brief answer: "The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us."⁷

⁷ Saint Jerome, *Letter* 14.10.

There is nothing to fear in this struggle, for the glory yet to be given far outweighs the difficulty. Only after engaging in our own struggle can we help someone else in their struggle and help them to bear great fruit.

Now, my brother Knights, the Church and the world needs to see the witness of your love and we need to see your fruits of faith, of hope and of love; we need you to be active in the fields of the Church, helping to plow and pluck; we need you to help men and women, boys and girls, hear the word of God in all its richness and to understand it so as to reject what is contrary to the Gospel. In this way, the glory of the Lord may be revealed in them. This necessary work is what Blessed Pope John Paul II called the “new evangelization.”

Even within your fraternal organization there is much work to be done. A great many knights are not as active in their faith as they could and should be; they need your encouragement and invitation to follow the Lord more closely.

Outside of your fraternity, the situation is no less serious as the importance of faith and of religion is being criticized and forgotten; as the meaning and value of marriage is being degraded;

as the lives of the unborn are ignored and the dignity of the elderly undermined. Society itself needs your witness to shine brightly and intently!

You must show the world how to respond with joy and generosity to the grace of God; you must show others that a life lived in dedication to God and to neighbor is the path of authentic humanity and the path of lasting happiness and peace. You must show those who grown weak in faith how to let the saving love of God grow within them!⁸

You know that in this great work in the Lord's fields, you have the support and strength of the Church and you have the fraternal help of one another. As I encourage you with these words today I also congratulate you most heartily on this 100th anniversary of your Council here in Highland. Truly such a milestone is a testament to the faith of your fathers and of your own desire to follow those who have followed Father McGivney. If you keep the faith of your fathers ever in your hearts, you will indeed bear fruit and yield a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold (cf. Matthew 13:23).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

⁸ Cf. Prayer after Communion, The Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time.