

**Homily for the 100th Anniversary of Knights of Columbus Council 1712
December 14, 2013**

**Saints Peter and Paul Parish
Collinsville, Illinois**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: in 2011, the Henry B. Tippie School of Management at the University of Iowa offered a full scholarship worth \$37,000 to the MBA program for the applicant who provided the best answer to an essay question as a part of the application process. The catch was that the answer had to be in the form of a Twitter post, not exceeding 140 characters. The director of admissions and financial aid explained the rationale by saying: "That's sort of the power statement you need to sell yourself quickly and concisely, the way you have to sell yourself quickly and concisely in business."¹

Although unconventional in its approach, this program reflects a principle that many people subscribe to, namely that less is more when it comes to introducing an idea. People are drawn to short summaries which give them an overview as they prepare to enter deeper into a given subject. We have seen this for many years with newspapers and magazines which provide brief headlines that catch the readers' attention and prepare them

for what follows. It is also a common practice that when a book is published, the author asks for people to provide a short endorsement which usually includes a very brief summary of the contents of the book to give the potential reader a snapshot of what is in store for them as they prepare to read the book.

The liturgy of the Church, in fact, has been employing a similar practice for hundreds of years. For each Mass, there are a set of prayers and passages from the Scriptures that are unique to each Mass. One of those passages is what is known as the Entrance Antiphon, sometimes also referred to as the Introit, from the Latin word *introitus* which means “entrance.” The Entrance Antiphon is a short passage from the Scriptures at the very beginning of the Mass which sets the tone and gives a sort of summary for what will follow.

The Entrance Antiphon for today’s Mass of the Third Sunday of Advent comes from St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians where he writes: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near” (Philippians 4:4, 5). The first word we hear is the command to rejoice. The Latin word used here is *gaudete* and it is from this that we get the name for this mass – Gaudete Sunday.

To aid us in this invitation to rejoice, the vestments used on this Sunday are rose-colored, a color which is only used twice in the liturgical year on occasions of joyful anticipation. The other time this color is used is on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, known as Laetare Sunday, whereby we mark the halfway point of Lent as we look forward with joy to the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. Today, we rejoice in anticipation, for the birth of the Lord is indeed near.

When we hear the word “joy,” we often equate it with the feeling of pleasure or happiness. There are many things in our modern world which promise us happiness and pleasure, such as money, possessions, and success. All of these may bring us good feelings for a time, but in the end, they never bring fulfillment and satisfaction. Once we have been enticed by the initial pleasures of these things, we want more and more, and the drive for the happiness these things bring takes more and more of our energy, and when they are gone, we are left feeling empty and sad.

In his recently released Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis addresses this dynamic when he writes: “The great danger in today’s world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the

feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience.”² He further explains that the pursuit of these pleasures results from our being caught up in our own interests and concerns. The sole remedy to this lack of true joy is an encounter with God’s love, “which blossoms into an enriching friendship,” and by which “we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption.”³

Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and, as such, is not truly possible without a relationship with God. This relationship is made possible in a particular way through Christ, who took our human flesh so that we might be more closely united to Him. We can see this in the Gospel for today’s Mass. The disciples of St. John the Baptist are sent to Jesus to ask Him the question: “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3) In a homily on this passage, St. Francis de Sales explains the intention of St. John the Baptist in sending them to Jesus. He writes:

In was not, therefore, because St. John doubted in the least that Our Lord was the Messiah that he sent his disciples to question Him. He sent them for their own benefit and advantage to make Him [Jesus] known to the whole world; not to draw them

to himself [St. John] but to detach them from him; to let them see the miracles that Jesus Christ performed so that they might come to Him in a manner worthy of Him.⁴

In other words, St. John the Baptist wanted his disciples to encounter Christ personally, so that they would come to know the one of whom he preached and to experience the joy of having a personal relationship with the Messiah. St. John the Baptist did not want himself to be the center of their attention; rather, he wanted Christ to be at the center of their lives.

There is a practice that takes place every year on the Third Sunday of Advent where children gather in St. Peter's Square to have the figures of the Christ child to be used in their Nativity scenes blessed by the Pope. It serves as a reminder to young and old that just as the infant Christ is placed at the center of these scenes, so too must Christ be at the center of our celebration of Christmas and at the center of our entire lives. In his address on the occasion of this blessing in 2009, Pope Benedict remarked: "This, dear friends, is what true joy consists in: it is feeling that our personal and community existence has been visited and filled by a great mystery, the mystery of God's love."⁵

Returning to the recent document on the Joy of the Gospel by Pope Francis, he concludes his introductory comments on joy by asking the following question: “For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?”⁶ Unlike the selfish seeking of happiness and pleasures which turns us in upon ourselves, the joy of being a Christian turns us outward to share the love of God with those around us.

In this regard, I would like to say a few words regarding the Knights of Columbus who are gathered here with us this evening as they celebrate their 100-year anniversary as a council here in Collinsville. This organization reflects in a very visible way this call to share the joy of the Gospel with those around them. This is accomplished in various ways, but most especially in the charitable works that they undertake. Charity is one of the foundational principles of the Knights. The organization explains this principle in the following way: “Knights recognize that our mission, and our faith in God, compels us to action. There is no better way to experience love and compassion than by helping those in need, a call we answer every day.”⁷

This local council has answered this call in various ways over the past century, not the least of which has been their work to raise money to support programs and services that benefit those with intellectual disabilities. Also of note are their support of the Pro-Life movement, campus ministry at the Newman Centers of secular colleges and universities, and seminarians preparing for ordination to the priesthood in our diocese.

The local Church of Springfield in Illinois and this local community are grateful for the contributions that this council has made for the building up of the Church in this area. The work of the Knights reflects a response to the command of St. Paul to “rejoice in the Lord always,” a joy which translates into seeking to be of assistance to those in need. We are all encouraged to renew our encounter with Christ in our preparation for the celebration of Christmas. By doing so, we will come to experience the warmth of His love in our lives, a love that brings us true joy and peace in this life and which looks forward to eternal joy with God forever in Heaven.

I would like to conclude with the words that our Holy Father addressed to the Knights of Columbus this past October on the occasion of

the visit of several members of the Knights to the Holy Father in Rome. Though directed to the organization in particular, let us hear in his words a message for all of us in the Church to heed with the joy of being disciples of Christ. The Holy Father offered these words: “May prayer, witness to the faith and concern for our brothers and sisters in need always be the pillars supporting your work both individually and corporately. In fidelity to the vision of the Venerable Father Michael McGivney [founder of the Knights of Columbus], may you continue to seek new ways of being a leaven of the Gospel and a force for the spiritual renewal of society.”

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Tippie School of Management, “Planning on an MBA? Your Tweet Could Be Worth \$37,000.” <http://tippie.uiowa.edu/news/story.cfm?ID=2639>.

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2.

³ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 8.

⁴ St. Francis de Sales, *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales – For Advent and Christmas*, 7.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus Address*, 13 December 2009.

⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 8.

⁷ Knights of Columbus, *Our Principles*, kofc.org