

**Homily for the 100th Anniversary of Council #1692 of the Knights of Columbus
St. Francis Xavier Church, Jerseyville**

**The Eleventh Sunday of Ordinary Time - Cycle C
June 15, 2013**

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

Dear Priests and Deacons, Sir Knights, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, anniversaries such as the one we celebrate today—the 100th Anniversary of Council #1692 of the Knights of Columbus—always provide us a profound moment in which to pause to consider both the past and the future from the vantage point of the present moment. How is it that we have arrived at this moment, and to what moment does it now appear we are heading?

When the Venerable Michael J. McGivney founded the Knights of Columbus in 1882 he recognized the uncertainty in which many Catholic families found themselves. Living in a land that was not always well-disposed towards Catholics, he saw the need for Catholic men to join together to see to each other's spiritual, fraternal, and financial needs and to the same needs of their families. Recognizing the same needs here one

hundred years ago, the founders of Council #1692 brought the Knights of Columbus to Jerseyville.

With the passage of time these needs have not lessened and so it is that you, my brother Knights, continue your involvement with the Knights of Columbus. Today we give thanks to Almighty God for the many ways this fraternal order has cared for its members and non-members alike. Even as we render our thanks, we also seek God's blessing and protection upon the Knights of Columbus because we know that these same spiritual, fraternal, and financial needs will not lessen in the future. Indeed, if we know how to read the signs of the times, it seems these needs may very well increase and the presence and assistance of the Knights of Columbus will be as vital in the years to come as in Father McGivney's own day.

With great joy, I congratulate you on this great milestone in the history of your council and I thank you for your noble deeds in support of the downtrodden and in building up the community of faith.

Looking back over these past one hundred years of the Knights of Columbus in Jerseyville, what lessons can we learn from the past to aid us in the future? Writing in this month's issue of *Columbia*, the Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson wrote:

Today the Church asks of believers nothing more, and nothing less, than it has throughout her history: Profess what you believe and live what you profess. Such personal witness is the only way we can make an adequate response to the claims of today's militant atheists.¹

The challenge of the founders of the Knights of Columbus was to live as Catholics in a Protestant - and sometimes hostile - country. It was within such a cultural climate that Father McGivney established the Knights of Columbus so "Catholic men could confidently profess their faith by living lives of charity, unity, and fraternity in their parishes and local communities."²

The challenge of the Knights of Columbus in our day, and certainly in the years to come, is to live among "secularists who say there should be no Christian faith at all."³ These secularists - some of whom are atheists and some of whom are of one faith or another - claim with increasing influence that the "Christian faith is irrational and should have no influence on society."⁴

Today, too, we are in need of Catholic men who will confidently profess their faith by living lives of charity, unity, and fraternity in their parishes and local communities. What we need are men who will live as

true Knights of Columbus and as valiant and faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ. Anyone who lives in this way, who professes his faith intentionally with integrity and sincerity, can say with Saint Paul, “yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

Those who are soldiers listen for the orders of the one under whom they have been placed; when their commander says, “I have something to say to you,” they listen and carry out his will. So must it be with us! We must attune our ears to hear the voice of the Lord Jesus, under whom we have placed our lives, who says to each of us, “I have something to say to you” (Luke 7:40). To him, each one of us, together with the Pharisee Simon, must honestly say, “Tell me, teacher” (Luke 7:40).

As he did with the Pharisee, so will he do with us. He will remind us of his merciful love and call us to repentance. After listening intently to his words and recognizing their truth, each of us should turn continually towards him and say, “I have sinned against the Lord” (II Samuel 12:13). Not only this; we must not only speak these words as individuals, but we must also speak them collectively, as a corporate person, as members of the Knights of Columbus, as members of the Body of Christ, and as members of our cultural society.

To this end, the Catholic Bishops of the United States have called us to a Fortnight for Freedom, which begins in the evening of June 21st and concludes on Independence Day.

In the words of the Supreme Chaplain of the Knights of Columbus, Archbishop William Lori, this coming Fortnight for Freedom offers, “a sobering moment for all of us to realize how religious freedom has eroded over time and to ask for God’s help in protecting such a precious gift.”⁵ Since your founding, you, my brother Knights of Columbus, have played an important role in defending and promoting religious liberty in our nation, especially through your worthy efforts in the defense of life, your generous support of the Newman Centers, and through your tireless work to promote and defend authentic marriage and true religious liberty. And now, in these trying times, the Knights of Columbus have pledged your support to this most important effort. I ask each of you to participate as fully as possible in this two-week period of prayer and education and encourage you to invite your families and neighbors, your friends and co-workers to do the same.

At the present moment we seem to be heading toward a future of diminishing freedom of religion and a greater restriction of its free exercise in these United States of America. Together, though, with the Lord's aid, we can turn this tide. By acknowledging and confessing our sins and by professing what we believe and living what we profess, we can regain our first and most cherished liberty and restore it to its exalted and foundational place in this great American experiment.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Carl A. Anderson, "Thinking With the Church," *Columbia*, June 2013 [93:6], 3.

² Carl A. Anderson, "Thinking With the Church," *Columbia*, June 2013 [93:6], 3.

³ Carl A. Anderson, "Thinking With the Church," *Columbia*, June 2013 [93:6], 3.

⁴ Carl A. Anderson, "Thinking With the Church," *Columbia*, June 2013 [93:6], 3.

⁵ William E. Lori, "The Fortnight Continues," *Columbia*, May 2013 [93:5], 13.