

**Homily for the Knights of Columbus Mass at
St. Paul Church,
Highland, Illinois
March 21, 2021**

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

- Mass of Beatification for Venerable Father Michael J. McGivney took place on October 31, 2020 in the Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Hartford, Connecticut.
 - Michael Joseph McGivney was born in Waterbury, Conn., on August 12, 1852.
 - Michael was ordained at the age of 25 by Archbishop (later Cardinal) James Gibbons on Dec. 22, 1877, in Baltimore's historic Cathedral of the Assumption, the nation's first cathedral.
 - Father Michael J. McGivney, the 29-year-old assistant pastor of St. Mary's Church in New Haven, Conn., gathered a group of men at his parish on Oct. 2, 1881. He proposed establishing a lay organization to prevent Catholic men from entering secret societies antithetical to Church teaching, uniting Catholic men and helping families of deceased members.
 - To demonstrate their loyalty to their country as well as their faith, these men took Christopher Columbus — recognized as a Catholic and celebrated as the discoverer of America — as their patron.¹
 - Never robust in health, Father McGivney fell ill with tuberculosis and was stricken with severe pneumonia in January 1890. The young priest lost physical strength just as his Order was moving toward new vitality. After seeking respite and remedies, he was eventually confined to bed in the rectory, where his concern and prayers for his people only increased. He died on August 14, two days past his 38th birthday.

- The funeral was an indication of the love and respect the people held for this hard-working, holy parish priest. His funeral drew Catholics from across the state, including the bishop, more than 70 fellow priests, and civic leaders. Mourners rented every available carriage within miles for the procession to the McGivney family plot in Waterbury.
- The funeral also reflected the deep personal appeal that Catholics found in the Knights of Columbus. Delegations came from almost every one of the 57 Knights of Columbus councils that had been chartered in the Order's first eight years.²
- In a short span of years, dying just after his 38th birthday, this holy parish priest accomplished more than many who live to old age.
- Father McGivney is best known for the two great graces of his life:
 - First, he was a priest, a man set apart for the service of God and the salvation of souls;
 - Second, he established the Knights of Columbus, now a worldwide fraternal society for Catholic men with more than 2 million members.
- Beatification brings to mind holiness of life and spiritual vision.
- A McGivney Miracle
 - The healing of an unborn child from a fatal medical condition was the miracle approved by Pope Francis that opened the way for the beatification of Venerable Father Michael McGivney. The child was the 13th for Michelle and Daniel Schachle of Dickson, Tenn., in the Diocese of Nashville.

- Early in the pregnancy, a routine ultrasound revealed the boy had Trisomy 21 (Down syndrome) and a serious case of fetal hydrops, a relatively rare condition in which two or more major organs of the unborn child fill with fluid. The couple was offered abortion by doctors who said that the boy was sure to die in utero. A pro-life Knights of Columbus family, the Schachles declined abortion and prepared to accept whatever God would send them.
- A general agent for the Order's insurance program in Tennessee, Daniel began to pray to Father McGivney with his wife, and asked their children, relatives, friends and colleagues to do the same. If the child survived, they promised to name him after Father McGivney.
- In March 2015, Daniel embarked on a pilgrimage with fellow K of C agents to Fatima, and Michelle went with him after getting clearance from her doctors to travel. At the renowned Marian Shrine in Portugal, where the Blessed Mother visited three shepherd children and the Miracle of the Sun occurred in 1917, Daniel and Michelle experienced spiritual consolation and the hint of a healing.
- Still praying through the intercession of Father McGivney, the couple attended a Mass offered by Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore, the Order's supreme chaplain. The Gospel of the day, read by Dominican Father Jonathan Kalisch, director of chaplains and spirituality for the Knights, told the story of the Roman official who asked Jesus to heal his son, who was sick unto death. When they heard the words of Jesus, "Go, your son lives," Daniel and Michelle looked at one another, and she felt "a veil" lifted from her.
- After returning to Tennessee, Michelle visited her doctors for an ultrasound and was told that the child showed no signs of fetal hydrops. Without treatment or medical intervention of any kind, the child in the womb was healed of the fatal condition. Michael McGivney Schachle, affectionately called Little Mikey, was born

May 15, 2015, and is now a healthy, active child with Down syndrome, surrounded by a grateful and loving family.

- Word of the extraordinary healing reached the Supreme Council a few months after the child's birth, and the postulator of Father McGivney's cause, Dr. Andrea Ambrosi, directed a preliminary investigation with the assistance of Vice-Postulator Brian Caulfield. A formal diocesan tribunal was opened in Nashville in April 2016 to investigate the healing, assess medical records and call witnesses with firsthand knowledge of the case, including the attending physicians.
- The tribunal concluded its proceedings in September 2017, when the full 700-page report, including testimonies and medical records, was sent to the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Over the course of more than two years, the congregation studied the case and convened a board of medical experts who declared that the healing had no medical or scientific explanation. The congregation also referred to a panel of theologians who affirmed the exclusive intercession of Father McGivney.
- On May 26, 2020, the case was brought before Pope Francis, who approved the miracle attributed to the intercession of Father McGivney and declared that the founder of the Knights of Columbus could now be beatified, the last step in the canonization process before sainthood. The Vatican announced the Holy Father's approval the next day.
- In his annual report at the Supreme Convention last August, Supreme Knight Carl Anderson said that the healing of Little Mikey was a true Knights of Columbus miracle, having involved the Order's commitment to protecting human life from conception to natural death, the dignity of persons with intellectual disabilities, the centrality of the family as the domestic church and the mission of the insurance program to protect families for generations. He said, "Why did this miracle heal an unborn child in the womb? Why was that healing discovered through

ultrasound technology? Why was a child with Down syndrome saved? Why was he conceived into a large Catholic family, a family whose father sees his business as a vocation of service to fellow Catholics, a father who is a dedicated brother Knight of Columbus? The answer to all these questions must have deep meaning for the future of the Knights of Columbus How can we not see in the circumstances of this miracle an affirmation of the vision and legacy of our founder? And how can we also not see in the circumstances of this miracle the call to each of us, as brother Knights of Columbus, to live more fully our own vocation of charity, unity and fraternity?"³

- During this season of Lent as we seek to grow in grace, Blessed Michael McGivney is a wonderful role model for us to emulate.
 - In the Gospel reading we just heard (Deuteronomy 15:7-11), Jesus says, "The Father will honor whoever serves me."
 - This is how the saints lived, serving the Lord and His Church.
 - This is how Father Michael McGivney lived during his short life, giving himself totally to God and the people he served, for which he is now honored as Blessed.
 - So we should be encouraged by those who have gone before us, who now rejoice in the heavenly kingdom. Our saints are cheering us on, lifting us up by their examples of faithfulness, and helping us by their prayers.
- May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Source: <https://www.kofc.org/en/who-we-are/our-history/founding-and-early-acts.html>.

² Source: <https://www.fathermcgivney.org/en/his-life>.

³ Source: *Father Michael J. McGivney Guild Newsletter*, October-December 2020.