

FROM THE PASTOR
OCTOBER 8, 2023
TWENTY SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

The Knights of Columbus

Tomorrow our nation will observe Columbus Day, commemorating that day in 1492 when (supported by King Fernando of Aragon and Queen Isabel of Castile) the Genoese sailor Cristoforo Colombo "sailed the ocean blue". On this famous historical expedition, Columbus not only planted in the soil of the New World the flag of the Houses of Aragon and Castile but most especially, the Standard of the Holy Cross. While the primary goal of this daring excursion to find a shorter trade route to India seemed an apparent failure, it was in fact a much greater discovery in the long run.

On January 2, 1492, the great green flag with its crescent moon, the flag of Islam, was lowered over the beautiful city of Granada, and the standard of the Holy Cross was raised. Granada (my own favorite city in all of Spain) had been the last stronghold of the Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula and with its fall, finally all of Spain and Portugal were Christian again. Queen Isabel of Castile had sold her jewels to support this great enterprise of liberating Spain from the Muslims. (Historians who claim that the jewels were sold for the great voyage of Columbus to the Indies are mistaken). On that day of the final expulsion of the Moors, Queen Isabel made a vow to God who had finally delivered Spain from the Muslims, that she would finance the great enterprise of Columbus to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth. It is in Granada that Fernando and Isabel (Ferdinand and Isabella) are entombed. I celebrated Mass at their tombs on November 20, 1987. To me that Mass seems like yesterday, but it was 36 years ago.

Without a doubt, there were many profiteers among the Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French, Dutch, and English explorers who followed Columbus, venturing forth in search of gold and other treasures. Yet this material goal still did not totally eclipse the vision of those who saw that the harvest was also ripe for the winning of souls to Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven. Many missionary priests and religious brothers also came on these voyages, for both the spiritual needs of the explorers and to bring the Catholic Faith to the native peoples of this vast land. Over the next few centuries, immigrants from numerous European countries came to the colonies in search of religious freedom and the opportunity for a new way of life in a land whose (eventual) Constitution would make no provision for an established state religion

and supposed equality for all people to worship God as they saw fit. However, that did not mean that religious persecution – particularly that of Catholics – would be completely unheard of.

Fast-forward 375+ years. Late-19th century Connecticut was marked by the growing prevalence of fraternal benefit societies, hostility toward Catholic immigrants and dangerous working conditions in factories that left many families fatherless. Recognizing a vital, practical need in his community, Father Michael J. McGivney, the 29-year-old parochial vicar 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, the goal of which would be to prevent Catholic men from entering secret societies whose membership was antithetical to Church teaching, to unite men of Catholic faith and to provide for the families of deceased members. This was a time of virulent anti-Catholicism in our country (which still exists).

One need only think of the presidential election year of 1928 when the KKK, then most active on Long Island, manifested its hatred toward our Holy Faith in the person (who is one of my heroes, New York Governor Alfred E. Smith). The *New York Times*, in a scathing editorial, warned Americans that if Governor Smith were to be elected, the country would be run according to the dictates of Papal Encyclicals. Governor Smith, in his characteristic humility, wrote, quite correctly, "I have been a Catholic all my life. I hope I have been a devout one. But I do not know what an encyclical is!" Governor Smith has rightly been looked upon as a great hero by the Irish, but his mother's parents, as well as his father's mother were all born in Italy. He was a daily communicant and a frequent penitent. Historians credit his devastating loss to Herbert Hoover in 1928 not only to his Catholicism, but also, to the fact that he had never travelled west of the Hudson River. In an amusing anecdote he was attributed to not knowing the difference between Wisconsin and Kansas, and once referred to the City of Grand Rapids, North Dakota when he meant to say Rapid City, South Dakota. (Grand Rapids is in Michigan). When asked about this by journalists, he simply replied that if one were from the lower east side of Manhattan, one need know nothing else. He was a fervent "wet" during the sad time of the 18th amendment and Puritan prohibition in our country, and always served "adult" beverages in the Governor's Mansion in Albany. His successor as Governor of New York, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, often partook of so called "bootleg" liquor with Governor Smith in the Governor's Mansion in Albany, and when he was elected President of the United States, his first piece of legislation was to repeal Prohibition.

As a symbol that allegiance to their country did not conflict with allegiance to their faith, the organization's members took as their patron Christopher Columbus —

recognized as a Catholic and celebrated as the discoverer of America. Thanks to Father McGivney's persistence, the Knights of Columbus elected officers in February 1882 and officially assumed corporate status on March 29.

In addition to the Order's stated benefits, *Catholic men were drawn to the Knights because of its emphasis on serving one's Church, community, and family with virtue.* Writing in *The Columbian* in 1898, a year before he was elected supreme knight, Edward L. Hearn wrote that a Knight should live according to the virtues of loyalty, charity, courtesy, and modesty, as well as "self-denial and careful respect for the feelings of others." **Fraternity** and **patriotism** were added to the Knights' founding principles of **charity** and **unity** in 1885 and 1900, respectively.

Venerable Michael McGivney's foresight of over 140 years ago is still very much in effect today, and perhaps just as necessary for the Catholic community as it was then. The K of C insurance program is one of the largest and most secure in the world. Members participating in the program can provide for their loved ones in the event of a major calamity or death. The Knights and their work are not just present here in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, but in several countries in South America, Asia, and Europe. The Knights are a bulwark and example of organized Catholic laity taking their gift of faith and fraternity and defending the teaching of the Church and the rights of Catholics against segments of society (and governments) that are becoming increasingly atheistic, hostile towards religion in general and the Catholic Church most specifically. In fact, several years ago a United States Senator from a very large west coast state (who now occupies a very high position in the U.S. government) accused the Knights of Columbus of being a domestic terrorist organization. Anti-Catholicism flourishes in our country.

The Knights of Columbus is a Catholic, fraternal, charitable order open to Catholic men 18 years and older who are in good standing with the Church, believe in Her teachings, are faithful to Holy Mass and the sacraments, and who want to bring the charity of Christ to others, both Catholics and those outside the Church. Included within the Order are the Columbiettes – the women's branch – and the Squires and Squirettes –open respectively to Catholic boys and girls below the age of 18. We are so blessed here at St. Paul's to have our Squires who provide such charitable services for us. Our own squires' Circle has earned the Brother Barnabas award for two years in a row.

In our parish of St. Paul, the Apostle we are very blessed to have both the Knights and the Squires. I consider them among my most trusted and loyal cooperators in building faith. I have had the blessing in my ten years as your pastor to work with

five Grand Knights and seven Chief Squires. Mr. Peter Boyle served faithfully and with unparalleled dedication as Grand Knight until 2014. He is now a PGK (that means Past Grand Knight). Mr. James Galante served as Grand Knight from 2014 to 2017 and did as outstanding a job as Mr. Boyle. Whenever I need anything, I turn to the Knights. I turn to them for support in the difficult office of pastor which has fallen upon my unworthy shoulders. Mr. Donald Cavanaugh, whose family has been an integral part of St. Paul's for more than 50 years, was our Grand Knight after Mr. Galante. Mr. James Viania was Grand Knight until last month and now Mr. Thomas Principe serves as Grand Knight.

Our present Chief Squire is Nicholas Carone who has exemplified outstanding leadership as have his predecessors, Michael Bernardini, Thomas Marriott, Jacob Kozhipatt, Daniel Esposito, Steven Northshield, Thomas Lynch and Christian Coletta. The squires provide a great and holy service for us each year when they hold the Holy Cross for over 30 minutes as we each come forward, the priest barefoot, to kiss the Holy Cross on Good Friday. I am most grateful to Mr. Kevin Spillane who serves as Chief Counsellor to our Squire Circle (of which I am Father Prior). The Squire Circle is named in blessed and eternal memory of PGK Eugene J. Reilly. There have been many other Grand Knights and Chief Squires. I am just naming those who have served in that office while I have been pastor of St. Paul the Apostle. Certainly, to be singled out are Mr. Leo Benjamin who went home to God five years ago and Mr. James Black, Esq., who have served as Grand Knights. Six years ago, five of our former squires, Daniel, and Stephen Esposito, took the fourth degree as Knights of Columbus. Congratulations to them and to all our Knights and Squires and from your priest sincere gratitude.

One blessing we have is that the Knights do not have a building as some Councils do. Councils who have buildings find that 90% of their energy goes to maintaining the property. Since our Knights do not have a Council Hall, they can devote 100% of their energy to the fraternal and spiritual ends of the order.

Vivat Jesus! Viva Cristo Rey!

In Jesus and Mary,

Monsignor James F. Pereda

