Founder’s Day Mass Brings Anniversary Year to a Close
Father McGivney’s Vision Lauded

Supreme Chaplain Bishop William E. Lori said the Knights of Columbus has much in common with the early Church and should follow the example of the Apostles in the years ahead. He made these remarks during his homily at a Founder's Day Mass March 29 at St. Mary’s Church in New Haven. The Mass marked the end of the Order's 125th anniversary year.

It was a “sense of Christ-centered belonging” that motivated the Apostles, Bishop Lori said. Knights should “view contemporary needs and problems, as well as their practical resolution, through the lens of the Word of God and the long experience of the Church.” In the Apostles, he added, “we find the principles of charity, unity and fraternity exemplified.”

Bishop Lori said every Knight should be “deeply grateful” that Pope Benedict XVI declared Father Michael J. McGivney a “Venerable Servant of God” March 15. “We are not wrong to see this declaration of our founder as a ringing affirmation, not only of the worthiness of Father McGivney’s cause for sainthood, but indeed as a ringing affirmation of the Order he founded.”

Speaking about the then-upcoming visit of Pope Benedict to the United States, Bishop Lori said that the pope’s trip “deeply inspires us in the spirit of our founder to rededicate ourselves to his principles and mission as we move ahead into another fraternal year and toward our 150th anniversary.”

At a reception following Mass, Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson spoke to hundreds of Connecticut Knights and their families. He said the 125th anniversary year had been a time for members to rededicate themselves to Father McGivney’s vision. Commenting on the decree of heroic virtue accorded to Father McGivney by Pope Benedict, the supreme knight said Knights should recommit themselves to being “the strong right arm of our parish priests as loyal sons of Father McGivney.”

Anderson said it was a sign of Father McGivney's “spiritual genius” that the Knights was founded on the principles of charity, unity and fraternity. “These are also the foundation of the civilization of love,” he said.

An Excerpt from Bishop Lori’s Founder’s Day Homily

The longer I serve as supreme chaplain of the Knights of Columbus, the more amazed — even awe-struck — I have become. Although I always tried to be a faithful member of the Order, and even served as state chaplain for the District of Columbia, I truly had no adequate idea of the depth of the Order's spirituality and the breadth of its charitable activities — that is, until I became supreme chaplain.

Now, in these days following the declaration of our founder, Father Michael J. McGivney, as a “Venerable Servant of God,” it dawns on me more forcefully that, despite my unworthiness, I may well have been called to follow in the footsteps of a saint — a saint who lived not so long ago and who ministered in this beautiful church dedicated to Mary, Mother of God.

What’s more, by being exposed much more often to the principles and ideals at the heart of our Order, especially faith, unity and charity, I find myself reading the Scriptures in a new light.

To listen to Bishop Lori’s complete homily in MP3 audio format, visit www.kofc.org/chaplains.
When I was growing up, I sometimes visited an elderly gentleman who lived on our street. He had the largest house in the neighborhood and owned interesting cars. He knew that I was thinking about becoming a priest and tried to talk me out of it because he was uncertain whether or not God even existed. Ironically, my neighbor wanted to talk about religion even though he really did not believe in God. All I wanted to do was see his cars and all the nifty tools and gadgets he owned.

My neighbor was the first of many people I have encountered who either do not believe in God or remain uncertain about his existence. Even more common today are people who live as though God does not exist or matter. As a member of the Lord’s “sales team,” I have learned to view these encounters as opportunities for evangelization. They present themselves all the time — in airports and on airplanes, at dinners and meetings, in spontaneous conversations, and in my daily correspondence. Little did I know that my boyhood neighbor was getting me ready for a lifetime of advocating belief in God.

REFUTING THE NEW ATHEISM

The first line of the Nicene Creed, which we recite at Sunday Mass, is: “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.” This sentence affirms one’s personal belief joined to the Church’s communal belief in the existence of God. It is the most fundamental affirmation of all, key to all that the Church believes and teaches. It is also fundamental to how we look at our own lives, the society in which we live, and the world itself. My column this month and next will focus on that first sentence of the Creed, and the basis for these reflections is sections 36-65 of the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

If God did not exist, both human life and creation would lose their transcendent meaning. The world and those who dwell in it could no longer be seen as reflecting the goodness of an all-powerful God who is above and beyond the created universe. In addition, we would not have a destiny beyond our present experience.

In my February 2008 column, I noted that a resurgence of atheism is under way, fueled by authors such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. They do not make new arguments to discredit belief in God; rather, they take advantage of an increasing secular culture to rehash old and shaky arguments. Even sympathetic reviewers sometimes complain about these writers’ shoddy scholarship, lack of logic and use of intemperate language against believers.

In my view, there are two good ways to counter neo-atheism. The first is to live our faith with integrity and love. The second is to deepen our awareness of why the Church, through the centuries, remains deeply and serenely confident in the power of reason, even when unaided by the light of faith, to arrive at the truth that God exists. We can know the existence of God as we reflect on the beauty and order of creation and ponder how our world and the universe itself came to be. We can detect God’s existence in the continual urgings of our conscience to do good and avoid evil, and in the restlessness of our hearts for a fulfillment that nothing in this world can provide. Pope Benedict XVI addresses these fundamental human aspirations that point to God in his encyclical Spe Salvi (On Christian Hope). He asks: “... when does reason truly triumph? When detached from God? When it has become blind to God?” [23]. The pope convincingly argues that human reason is truly human when it looks beyond itself. Only then does reason perceive the dangers of godlessness to human dignity.

‘I AM WHO AM’

Most of us, I would venture to say, know God first and foremost because he revealed himself to us and gave us the gift of faith. Enlightened by faith, we more readily see the reasonableness of maintaining God’s existence. Faith does not destroy reason but enables it to look more competently beyond itself. Faith also allows us to hold fast to God as the foundation of our existence and to assent to all he has revealed.

God revealed himself in creation and in the history of salvation. God also revealed himself to his Chosen People as the only true and living God: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (Deut 6:4). Again and again the prophets confirmed that there is only one true and living God, and reproached the people whenever they fell into idolatry. Jesus also confirmed that there is only one God. [In revealing the three Persons of the Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — Jesus did not compromise the oneness of God, a point we shall dwell on more fully in next month’s article.] Not only did God reveal to the people of Israel that he is the one and only God, he also revealed his name to them. First he was known as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob” [Ex 3:6], indicating how he guided and protected the people of Israel. God also revealed his mysterious name to Moses in the episode of the burning bush — “I AM WHO AM” [YHWH] — reflecting that God is the very fullness of being and indeed remains utterly steadfast, gracious and forgiving in his relationship with the people of Israel. Jesus also applied the mysterious name “I AM” to himself to indicate his divine Sonship [see, for example, Jn 8:28].

In revealing his name to the people of Israel, God did not merely provide information about himself, but instead revealed “the riches contained in the ineffable mystery of his being” [Compendium, 40]. God’s name indi-
cates that he has always existed and will always exist. It tells us that he exists above and beyond the universe and history. It also tells us that he created the world and all that is in it. All created things borrow existence from God; God alone is the fullness of being. Unseen, he is completely spiritual. He is “transcendent, omnipotent, eternal, personal and perfect” (Compendium, 40).

GOD IS LOVE
God's name also shows his closeness to his people and his determination to unite himself to them in their journey through history. He is ready to protect and forgive them. As we read the Old Testament, we see a growing awareness, thanks to the Holy Spirit, of how God's transcendent greatness fits together with his nearness to his people.

The Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church sums up God's attributes by saying “He is truth and love.” Scripture affirms not only that God is truthful (he can never deceive nor be deceived) but that he is the origin of all that is true, wise and good. “God, who alone made heaven and earth, can alone impart true knowledge of every created thing in relationship to himself” (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, 216). God's word is utterly trustworthy when he reveals himself to us, especially through his Son Jesus who came “to testify to the truth” (Jn 18:37).

God also revealed himself as love. He loved the people of Israel with a passionate, spousal love, a love that was fully revealed and fulfilled in Christ. That is why St. Paul in Ephesians speaks of Christ's nuptial love for the Church: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her” (Eph 5:25). Ultimately, in Christ, God was revealed not merely as the doer of loving deeds but as love itself. “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8, 16). This sublime truth was the subject of the Holy Father's first encyclical, Deus Caritas Est, and the theme of the Knights of Columbus Supreme Convention in 2006.

Reflecting on the greatness and majesty of the one God in whom we believe will deepen our faith. It will also inspire us in a spirit of trust and thanksgiving, especially in times of difficulty. As we reflect on God's greatness are we not filled with wonder and awe that he made us in his own image? The stronger our faith in God, the more willing we are to defend human life and its God-given dignity.

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR COUNCIL USE

1. What significance does faith in God have on how we see the world? What are two ways that believers can refute the claims of the “new atheism”?

2. Bishop Lori notes that Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical Spe Salvi, discusses several human experiences that provide rational evidence for the existence of God. What are some of them? Do they ring true? How do revelation and the gift of faith affect our reason?

3. In what ways has God revealed himself to us? What are some of the essential characteristics God has revealed about himself?

4. What does it mean to say that God is “the fullness of being”? How do truth and love relate to God?

The Ascension of the Lord (Thursday, May 1) Today is also the memorial of St. Joseph the Worker, an appropriate day to bless tools for work. See “Blessing of Tools or Other Equipment for Work” in the Book of Blessings nos. 919-941.

Soledomity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (May 30) An excellent gesture of devotion to the Lord is the enthronement of an image of the Sacred Heart in the home or the Knights of Columbus meeting space (see the Book of Blessings nos. 1257-1276).

CHRONOLOGY OF THE VENERABLE SERVANT OF GOD FATHER MICHAEL J. McGIVNEY

May 24, 1883 — Attends the vesting ceremonies for the novices of the Sisters of Mercy held at St. Francis Church, New Haven

May 4, 1884 — Urges Knights to participate fully in parish life

May 5, 1885 — Attends the profession of vows of the Sisters of Mercy, Meriden, Conn.

May 7, 1928 — Rev. Msgr. Patrick J. McGivney, supreme chaplain and brother of Knights of Columbus founder, dies

Encourage your Knights to join the Father McGivney Guild at www.fathermcgivney.org

Visit www.kofc.org/chaplains to sign up to receive future issues of this newsletter via e-mail. Previous issues are also archived there.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Pentecost (May 11) For a Mother's Day blessing see the Book of Blessings nos. 1724-1728. (Mother's Day is a secular celebration and is not “trumped” by the solemnity of Pentecost.)

Feast of Our Lady of Fatima (May 13) This feast recalls Mary’s apparitions to the three children requesting our conversion of heart, repentance of sin, and prayer, especially the rosary. Consider leading the rosary for the intentions of the Knights of Columbus and their families today.

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) (May 25) An excellent day to pray for the Lord's grace to be bestowed on the International Eucharistic Congress to be held in Quebec in June.

The Ascension of the Lord (Sunday, May 4) World Communications Day
SUPREME KNIGHT’S BOOK CLUB
MAY 28, 5 PM (ET)

S upreme Knight Carl A. Anderson will discuss Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone’s new book, The Last Secret of Fatima, on May 28. The book is based on Cardinal Bertone’s extensive interviews conducted from 2000 to 2003 with Sister Lucia, the last living Fatima visionary.

The May issue of Columbia magazine features an exclusive excerpt from The Last Secret of Fatima, including Cardinal Bertone’s reflections on Marian devotion, the rosary and more. The book includes an introduction by Pope Benedict XVI.

Questions for the supreme knight may be submitted at www.kofc.org, and the live discussion will take place May 28 at 5 p.m. (ET).

FATIMA BOOKLET AVAILABLE FROM THE KNIGHTS’ CATHOLIC INFORMATION SERVICE

W hat is the true meaning of Mary’s message to the children of Fatima? Father Frederick L. Miller, STD, examines the subject in the Catholic Information Service booklet, The Message of Our Lady of Fatima (#341).

Father Miller covers such topics as “Mary’s Catechesis for the Modern World,” “Fatima and the New Millennium” and “Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.” The booklet is now also available in Spanish (#341S) and in MP3 audio format.

To get your free copy visit the CIS Web site, www.kofc.org/cis. Or, request a copy by writing: CIS, PO Box 1971, New Haven, CT 06521-1971.