

RECLAIMING MEN'S SPIRITUALITY  
THROUGH A RENEWAL OF THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

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In memory of my Mom,  
with thanksgiving for lessons taught in life  
and blessings sent in death.

## ABSTRACT

### RECLAIMING MEN'S SPIRITUALITY THROUGH A RENEWAL OF THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

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The Catholic Church has a male hierarchy yet the majority of its worshippers are female. Females dominate in unordained pastoral ministry as well as in catechetical programs. Why are so few laymen playing active roles in the faith community? Do they feel ill-equipped? Is the practice of religion seen as something feminine? Does the average man think that an all-male clergy is sufficient in representing the men of the community?

As gender roles change and develop, men need to recognize their call to the spiritual life and not abrogate their unique responsibility to teach and model the faith.

The Knights of Columbus is the premier Catholic men's organization, however its members can all too often be lax in the practice and weak in their knowledge of their Christian faith. In many ways, the Knights of Columbus is a microcosm of the broader Church, and as such, a study of the former is a controlled study of the latter.

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry Project was a renewal of the Council #5846 of the Knights of Columbus in Oakland, New Jersey. By discovering the members' religious interests, I, together with my Lay Advisory Committee, devised a program to both further their education and deepen their spirituality/religious

commitment. The formulation of that project, its execution and outcome are the subject of this thesis.

The process and experience can now be applied to larger and more diverse contexts with the expected results being equally profound.

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## CHAPTER I

### A QUEST FOR A MALE SPIRITUALITY

Can I be a real man and authentically spiritual? Numerous authors, movements, and organizations have attempted to answer this question for us. Many of us have struggled alone because none of the ways suggested seem practical, biblical, or authentic to us. Yet the quest continues.<sup>1</sup>

People of religious faith believe that throughout history God has spoken to both women and men. Initially reported as merely speaking out into the abyss to cause creation (Genesis 1), God soon spoke directly to Adam and then to Eve. When Hebrew Scripture moved beyond the initial narratives of creation and re-creation (Genesis 6) and began to detail the establishment of the People Israel (Genesis 12 f.), God's conversation knew no favoritism. God's concern becomes evident for both men and their descendants (e.g. Genesis 12: 2) as well as for women and theirs (e.g. Genesis 16: 10).

Yet even though women had conversations with God, and Deborah (Judges 4: 4) and Anna (Luke 2: 36) were raised up as prophets, male dominance in both society and religion was the obvious norm. Saint Paul wrote: "You who are wives, be submissive to your husbands"<sup>2</sup> and that "according to the rule observed in all the assemblies of

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<sup>1</sup> Gareth Brandt, *Under Construction: Reframing Men's Spirituality* (Waterloo, ON, Herald Press, 2009), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Colossians 3: 18 (NAB).



believers, women should keep silent in such gatherings.”<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, more often than not, it was a female Christian mystic who would claim to have apparitions of and conversations with Jesus Christ, e.g. Margaret Mary Alacoque, (1647 – 1690) or Mary Faustina Kowalska (1905 – 1938), both of whom were canonized as saints by the Roman Catholic Church. And although these women called for particular devotions, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Divine Mercy, respectively, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church was male and would oftentimes see itself in opposition to the Protestant Church, whose (re)formation in the early 15<sup>th</sup> Century was shepherded by men of the caliber of Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin, among others. It would not be until the mid-twentieth century that most mainstream Churches in the United States would begin to give women their rightful voice in proclaiming the Word of God and celebrating the sacraments/ordinances established by Jesus Christ.

In spite of the renewal (read: ordination of women) that has swept through the Protestant Churches and the Reform Movement of Judaism, and in spite of the renewal of the Catholic Church begun by Vatican Council II (1962 – 1965), its hierarchy and clergy has remained an exclusively male bastion. “Among the requests directed to Vatican II was that for the admission of women to priestly ordination....In Catholic sacramental theology before Vatican II the exclusion of women from priestly orders was regarded as unproblematic.”<sup>4</sup>

The irony of that system is that, in a world where increasing numbers of women have assumed leadership roles in both business and government, where more women than

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 14: 34.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1992), 271.

men attend college, ordained Catholic men continue to have the sole official voice while the majority of worshipping voices are female. Yet the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith “declines to treat the question in the context of discussion about equal rights for women, since access to the priesthood should not be regarded as a right.”<sup>5</sup> Women may not be part of the ordained clergy or decision-making process in the Curia of the Catholic Church, yet their place in the Church cannot be minimized either in their role as the first teachers of children in the ways of faith or in their dominance as pastoral ministers on most parish staffs.

The reality of feminine spirituality cannot be questioned, but outside of its clergy, is there a concrete *male* spirituality in the Catholic Church? “Many men have a misunderstanding of masculinity and would categorize anything spiritual as something less than masculine, something feminine.”<sup>6</sup> “Nor can Jesus even provide a real role model for them, for we have become so used to seeing Jesus as God that we never truly see Jesus as a man. He even has blond hair and blue eyes and surely does not have a penis.”<sup>7</sup>

A celibate male clergy (men who have penises for the purpose of urination only) in the Catholic Church does nothing to enhance the notion of masculine spirituality. “The symbolic superiority of male over and against female...could explain some of the difficulties that the male part of the Galatian congregations were facing...as men they must have been perceived as ‘different’, irregular, even abnormal...were they not real

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<sup>5</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, 272.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Fox, preface to *The Hidden Spirituality of Men: Ten Metaphors to Awaken the Sacred Masculine* (Novato, CA, 2008), x.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Rohr with Joseph Martos, *From Wild Man to Wise Man: Reflections on Male Spirituality* (Cincinnati: Saint Anthony Messenger Press, 1990), 98 – 99.

Jews and not real men either? Maybe a ‘third sex’ in between?”<sup>8</sup> If that feeling still exists among contemporary male members of the Catholic Church, is there any wonder that developing a men’s spirituality is a challenge to the average priest? “It is difficult for us as men to hang on to confidence in ministry when our sense of ministerial authority is undermined by gender dysphoria.”<sup>9</sup> Our Protestant brethren, most of whom are married with children, can celebrate their masculinity more fully and are thus seen as more of a regular guy than are Catholic priests.

Can there be such a thing as a specifically Catholic male spirituality? In a business world where an employer may not ask a prospective employee his/her gender, has everything become androgynous? Have we reached a point where, “in an attempt to respect the women’s movement, some men feel compelled to silence themselves and hide any ‘unacceptable’ maleness?”<sup>10</sup> Many men (and increasingly numbers of women) are not in the pews on Sunday. Opportunities to reach them and teach them must be created independent of weekend liturgies, and for those who are still in the pews, what they experience at worship must translate into their daily lives and not simply be empty ritual. “Spirituality is the quest for relation to the Other. To be spiritual is to be in touch with the self, with God, and with others. Many variables influence our spirituality: age, culture, personality, gender.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Brigitte Kahl, “Gender Trouble in Galatia,” in *Is There a Future for Feminist Theology?* Ed. Gerard Loughlin, et al. (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 71 – 72.

<sup>9</sup> Philip L. Culbertson, “‘The Things We Do!’ *Nurturing the Authority of Men in Ministry*,” in *The Spirituality of Men: Sixteen Christians Write About Their Faith*, ed. Philip L. Culbertson (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2002), 226.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Fox, xii.

<sup>11</sup> Gareth Brandt, 23.

Although called to be a priest to all people, the seeming lack of faith commitment among too many Catholic men is a great concern of mine. The Catholic Church is not alone in its paucity of men, especially young and early-middle aged men in its active ranks, but this reality must be addressed in this increasingly secular American culture. The Pew Research Center reports “one-fifth of the American public – and a third of adults under 30 - are religiously unaffiliated today.”<sup>12</sup>

And if our boys only see religion through the eyes of their mothers and learn about it from female catechists, is it any wonder why the Church and its practices come to be seen as feminine – *unmasculine*? “In almost all cultures, men are not born; they are made....Boy scouts, confirmation classes, Lions clubs and Elks clubs have tried to substitute, but with little spiritual effect.”<sup>13</sup> But how can men pass on their religious knowledge if they have none, or share their spiritual experiences if they have never had any? “One priest-friend told me that when he asked men how many could remember their fathers ever praying with them personally, less than one percent could!”<sup>14</sup>

As a pastor in a suburban parish, where I am also the sole priest with a small staff, it would be impolitic and impossible to focus on the spiritual development of one segment only, be it children or families, women or men. But while sacramental and religious education programs do exist for children with various activities encouraging parental participation; and while women’s prayer groups, that emerged from either

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<sup>12</sup> Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project, October 9, 2012, copyright: Pew Research Center, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Rohr, 31.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Rohr, 98.

Cornerstone or Cursillo, function for an albeit small segment of the parish population; activities directed at the men have been met with only limited success: Men's Cornerstones have been poorly attended and the Men's Prayer Group has only a handful of members. The Red Hat Society<sup>15</sup> flourishes rather nicely for both the social and spiritual needs of their age bracket, but when I summoned a group of men to determine whether or not a brother organization needed to be established (suggested names: *The Derby Society* or *The Tool Belt Society*), the men saw no reason for it. Civic organizations sufficed and the parish-sponsored Men's Breakfasts or Dinners filled any spiritual void. I saw the need and was disappointed that they did not. Again the women were more in tune with their spirituality than the men. "If you cannot find that Jesus energy in your church or parish, gather with a group of honest brothers who can protect you from and affirm you in something other than passivity (the withered hand) and negativity (scribes and Pharisees). You cannot do it alone."<sup>16</sup>

Was there "a group of honest brothers" who could, in turn, serve as leaven to a larger male population? Working with that group would be both valid and acceptable, building on what already is, assessing its weaknesses and then strengthening it and challenging it. Situating a project outside the traditional parish setting would also remove any notion of exclusivity in an otherwise welcoming environment. Specificity of place and narrowing of the target audience would keep things manageable and potentially serve as a pilot program for future use in a broader context.

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<sup>15</sup> The Red Hat Society is a social organization for women over the age of 50. Having reached a station in life where many things no longer matter, they are known to sport purple outfits and oftentimes, outlandish red hats.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Rohr, 91.

Places that provide the spaces, reasons, and opportunities for people to come together, to share their passions, hopes, and troubles, will be healthier, stronger places and places where people trust and care about each other. And the more involved and engaged we are, the more likely we are to care about our communities and to be committed to working on their behalf in the future.<sup>17</sup>

Whether it be Renew or Marriage Encounter, Cursillo or Discovering Christ, Bible Study or the Christian Family Movement, the Catholic Church has, for some time, recognized the value of small faith-sharing groups. The typically large worshipping community that convenes on Sundays is not necessarily conducive to personal spiritual growth among its members, especially if those members are in attendance only because of a Sunday obligation. And since those in attendance are majority female, the male is all too often left behind.

If men's spirits are to grow, they must be met both on their terms and on their home turf. "I define spirituality as the intimate and active participation of God's Holy Spirit, moving through human reality to embrace a meaningful life for individuals through the practices of prayer, worship, and personal unification in the social community."<sup>18</sup>

While self-perception and self-evaluation may differ from another's (read: my) perception of reality, The Knights of Columbus, the premier Catholic men's fraternal, civic, social and patriotic organization, certainly sees itself as a vehicle through which its members can "embrace a meaningful life...through the practices of prayer, worship, and

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<sup>17</sup> Timothy Beatley, *Native to Nowhere: Sustaining Home and Community in a Global Age* (Washington, Island Press, 2004) 5.

<sup>18</sup> Mike Bathum, "Discovering Creative Depth Within," in *The Spirituality of Men: Sixteen Christians Write About Their Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 99.

personal unification in the social community.”<sup>19</sup> There is a council geographically located in Oakland, and its members, although primarily comprised of my parishioners, both active and lapsed, belong to several of the area Catholic congregations. Based upon my longstanding impression of the Knights of Columbus, not only were they men in need of renewal, but they could be fertile ground for the seeds of both spiritual and religious rebirth in a larger context.

This would be new territory for me. Sunday homilies are, for lack of a better word, generic. The assembly consists of men and women; single, divorced, widowed and married; children, teenagers, young adults, the middle aged and senior citizens; Caucasian, African-American and Asian. It is impossible to address everyone and when singling out one particular group, e.g. mothers on Mother’s Day, others, of necessity, are ignored. Sunday Mass is not necessarily the time to address specifically men and their spiritual and religious educational needs, although it could be beneficial and even heartening for the women to hear.

Only the Cursillo Movement has given me the opportunity to work in a hybrid situation of men only, as it provides weekend experiences for one particular gender at a time. As a priest I have the unique opportunity to serve as Spiritual Advisor on both Women’s Weekends and Men’s Weekends. Yet the structure and outlines for the Talks are exactly the same for both Men’s and Women’s Weekends, the lens only changes because of the gender of the speaker and his/her target audience. The entire Weekend is heavily scripted and what the participants need to hear is pre-determined. In the formulation of the Weekend, which is controlled by the National Office in Texas, both

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<sup>19</sup> Mike Bathum, 99.

women and men have worked on the outlines of the Talks, thus generalizing the outline of the content. With Candidates who make the Weekend arriving at varying levels of faith experience and commitment, the impact of the Talks varies from individual to individual. A Men's Cursillo is different from a Women's Cursillo only insofar as men react to things differently than do women. As Spiritual Director of the Cursillo Movement for the Archdiocese of Newark, I always suggest that the Men's Team Members proceed with caution and be aware of the fact that their Candidates may be hesitant in sharing their feelings and expressing their faith. "We men have been allowing others, including corporations, the media, and politicians, to define our manhood for long enough. Who and where are the forces defining manhood for us and how are they profiting from this and at whose expense?"<sup>20</sup>

Cursillo believes that the men on any given Weekend are profiting, but I have my doubts. Specifically male outlines would go a long way in improving the Cursillo experience for most men. The gentle outlines that resonate with women do not necessarily make an impact on men. "In my humble opinion I believe much of the modern, sophisticated church is swirling in what I will describe as a kind of 'neuter' religion. It is one of the main reasons that doers, movers, shakers and change agents have largely given up on church people and church groups."<sup>21</sup>

Certainly the Knights of Columbus as a whole, as well as in its individual members, are doers and shakers. They are certainly dedicated to raising thousands of dollars for the Wounded Warrior Project and their collection for Special Needs Children

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew Fox, xxvi.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Rohr, 10.



is admirable. These two projects, among others, bring out not just their best Warrior-Hunter-Gatherer but also their finest protective, loving father qualities. In this context they are men among men without the influences of a neuter religion. “Spirituality is a matter of having a source of energy within which is a motivating and directing force for living.”<sup>22</sup>

Like all men, they have the energy and motivation to be part of worthwhile social and patriotic causes, now I needed to see if I could redirect some of that energy to a renewal of the religious spirit. Jesus the carpenter undoubtedly had rough hands with their fair share of scars from mishaps as he learned the trade. He spent his days with fishermen whose faces were surely weathered, if not leathered by the sun. And John the Baptist, who was “that necessary and good tension that we find between structure and anti-structure, between temple worship and ritual disenchantment,”<sup>23</sup> announced him.

With distinctly and unapologetically male images in view, the Christian man has healthy role models, many of whom were as imperfect as they are, but who found in Jesus something which resonated with their own spirits, allowing their lives to be enriched and renewed. With this in mind; I set my focus on the Knights of Columbus to begin my quest for a renewal of spirituality among Catholic men.

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Rohr, 88.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Rohr, 48.

## Chapter II

### THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS AND I: WHERE WE'VE BEEN, WHERE WE ARE, WHERE WE'RE GOING

Congregations are born from a generative spark of interactions between stories of faith and stories of place. Some person or group looks out on a particular landscape and says, 'There should be a church – or there should be a congregation of our preferred type – in this particular community.' That conclusion is not, of course, an isolated thought but part of a larger narrative that has shaped the awareness of the founder or founding group, a story about 'who we are (cultural and religious identity), 'what we are called to do or be' (religious purpose), and 'where we are now' (community and cultural context).<sup>1</sup>

The Knights of Columbus has always been part of my reality. My father was a Knight of Columbus. For years he bowled for their leagues and, against my will, I had to participate in their father-son tournaments. My mother and father went to the dinner-dances they sponsored. Sometimes our family went to their hall for wedding receptions. It was a Catholic men's organization and, as a youth, it was all I needed or cared to know.

At eighteen, my elder brother and his friends all became Knights of Columbus. When they turned twenty-one, it seemed they were always "going down to the Knights" where they availed themselves of the underpriced bar. It was then I decided that the Knights of Columbus was "a phony baloney Catholic drinking club," a notion that I carried with me well into my adulthood. Thus when I reached my eighteenth birthday and my mother (not my father or brother) suggested that I become a Knight, their reputation

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Mann, "Placed-Based Narratives," in *Finding Our Story*, ed. Larry A. Golemon (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2010), 59.

for offering wonderful life insurance policies to members being the trump card, I declined.

After being ordained a Catholic priest, I encountered the Knights of Columbus on a few occasions where I found myself disapproving of what I saw as officious behavior of men wearing admiral hats adorned with feathers, capes with brightly colored satin linings and swords. This only confirmed my earlier decision not to become a member.

When I assumed the pastorate of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (Oakland, New Jersey) in 1998, I discovered that there was a rather active chapter of the Knights of Columbus in town. Soon I was being asked if I were a Knight. When I replied that I was not, I was asked why not. My condescending adolescent observation, while still in the back of my mind, would not be an appropriate answer, but I was still determined not to join.

But some of the Knights always staffed the massive grill at the annual Parish Picnic. They would come to the Men's Breakfasts and Saint Joseph's Day Men's Dinners I occasionally sponsored at the parish. I was becoming friends with some of the Knights, not all of whom were older than I was.

Now when I was being asked to become a member, it was not strangers asking me. I began to feel obligated to join, all the while teasing that I would not unless I could get the feathers and the capes. They explained what that meant; that there were degrees of Knighthood, and who had the right to the regalia because of the degree they had achieved. Although Father McGivney had not been interested in degrees or regalia or ceremonies, "it was a necessary component of a fraternal group...along with passwords to be used. Without compelling ceremonies, the members would not feel that it was a

special privilege to be a Knight of Columbus.”<sup>2</sup> Although I saw it as silly, the men apparently took it all very seriously. They wanted me to be their chaplain but in order to fulfill that role; I had to be a member. Surely there was more to this organization than had been meeting my eye.

If I truly believed in men’s spirituality and desired them to grow closer to God, I had to meet them in one of their environments. “While there is no agreement about the exact nature of spirituality, it is clear that many people feel the need to explore the meaning and depth of their experience, partly, perhaps, as a reaction to trends such as materialism, commercialism, and anonymity in mass society.”<sup>3</sup> Thus I eventually went through the shrouded-in-secrecy initiation ceremony and became a First Degree Knight of Columbus.

Yet I was a member in name only. Another fixed monthly meeting was not of interest to me. I was glad when one of the Knights would take Men’s Breakfast tickets or Saint Joseph’s Day dinner tickets to sell at the meetings, but I was simultaneously annoyed because they could buy the tickets after Mass on the weekends – if they came to worship. This only underscored the hypocrisy that I felt endemic to the Knights of Columbus. A man could not become a member if he were not “a practical Catholic.” To me, that meant worshipping with the parish community if not regularly, at least nominally.

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Brinkley and Julie M. Fenster, *Parish Priest: Father Michael McGivney and American Catholicism* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 120.

<sup>3</sup> Marie McCarthy, “Spirituality in a Postmodern Era,” in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 191.

The Knights of Columbus is a self-proclaimed Catholic organization of men, yet for some of the members, there seemed to be greater identity with being a Knight than with being a Catholic. With the Mass assembly and parish ministries being female dominated, perhaps the Knights of Columbus was fulfilling an unspoken need for male identity and bonding. Maybe the Knights Hall was fulfilling this need more than the Church House. “We fundamentally need places, and in this increasingly global epoch this need is more critical than ever before. We need meaningful places to improve the quality of our lives and the depth of meaning of our personal and interpersonal relationships.”<sup>4</sup> This certainly was proved true when the membership worked nights and Saturdays to refurbish their building. It was during this process that I began to show my support and spend time with the Knights as they painted walls, laid tile floors and installed crown moldings.

Was the Knights Hall a place where men could be men and the Church House somehow less masculine? Barbara Ehrenreich believes that “for most people in the world today, the experience of collective ecstasy is likely to be found, if it is found at all, not in a church or rally but at a sports event.”<sup>5</sup> If men cannot hoot and holler for Jesus at Mass, maybe the best place to make some impact on their spiritual lives would be at the place where they play cards, hold horseshoe tournaments and scream at the big screen television set during football games. Maybe it is more masculine to be a Knight of

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Beatley, *Native to Nowhere: Sustaining Home and Community in a Global Age*, (Washington: Island Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 225.

Columbus than it is to be a Catholic man. “Today’s sports events mirror in many ways the rituals of hunting-gathering times.”<sup>6</sup>

From a combination of my own sense of responsibility and ministry, and the encouragement of one member who claimed that “the Knights of Columbus makes no sense without a priest,” I began to attend the monthly meetings. I was seated at the dais and called upon to pray an invocation and final prayer. As I listened to discussions and watched plans for activities unfold, I observed how many members were not present as well as the age of the members who were and wondered how this group was different from any other organization – religious or secular. I am the Chaplain for a chapter of the Blue Knights, an organization of motorcycling police officers, and I was hard-pressed to determine how they differed. My presence with the cops seemed to be more appreciated and even valued.

As part of my requirements for the invocation at every Knights of Columbus meeting, I call on Venerable Michael McGivney to “pray for us.” Would the Priest Founder of the Knights of Columbus recognize his own organization in its post-modern context? “The opening prayer by the Chaplain was an orthodox Catholic invocation, and embedded in the Order’s ceremonials were lessons in the Knights’ moral, religious, and civic duties.”<sup>7</sup> That was then this is now. Religion and religious organizations are not as important now as they once were. Is the all-too-often late-nineteenth century approach to its meetings and the Church hopelessly outdated or can the Knights of Columbus truly

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew Fox, 67.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher J. Kauffman, *Faith & Fraternalism: The History of the Knights of Columbus 1882 – 1982* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 50.

respond to both the spiritual and social needs of Catholic men? “*Habitus* is this almost unconscious agreement that here we do things this way. Forgotten as history, it is experienced as just the ways things were, are, and forever will be.”<sup>8</sup>

On October 2, 1881, Father Michael F. McGivney called a meeting of men at Saint Mary’s Church in New Haven, Connecticut, where he was serving as an assistant pastor.

They had no idea that the unique blend of Catholic, fraternal, and insurance features which they were designing would have such widespread international appeal. Because these features were planned by and appealed to Catholics of Irish descent, one must attempt to discern the specific social, economic, and religious needs of the Catholic minority in America – particularly of those Irish-American New Englanders – in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

The original tenets of the Knights of Columbus were *Charity* and *Unity*. Soon these were followed by *Fraternity* and *Patriotism*. “Father McGivney was deeply concerned about the number of young Catholic men who were attracted to secret fraternal societies. ‘Our primary object is to prevent our people from entering *Secret Societies* by offering the same if not better advantages to our members.’”<sup>10</sup> With Christopher Columbus as their patron, there could be no doubt that the Knights’ allegiance to country was not in conflict with allegiance to faith and vice versa.

Incorporated on March 29, 1882, the Knights of Columbus quickly grew in membership and prestige. By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were councils throughout the United States and Canada as well as in Mexico, the Philippines, Cuba and Mexico. They established a Chair in American History at the Catholic University of

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 52.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher J. Kauffman, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher J. Kauffman, 19.

America in Washington, D.C., and the college councils, which began at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, are currently present in 244 schools worldwide.

When America entered the First World War, the Knights of Columbus established “Huts” throughout the United States and Europe that provided religious services, supplies and recreation for everyone, regardless of race or creed. They proclaimed “Everybody Welcome, Everything Free.” While the Ku Klux Klan encouraged anti-Catholic sentiment in the 1920s, the Historical Commission of the Knights of Columbus published books combating racial and ethnic prejudice by citing the contributions of African-Americans, Jewish-Americans and German-Americans. By the 1930s, the Knights were sponsoring anti-Communist rallies, an effort that culminated in the campaign, initiated in 1951, to add the words “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance, a law that was signed into law by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1954. “We need communities which nurture and hold us, communities which keep the traditions and charisms alive and which hand them on to the next generation...And these traditions and charisms take root, develop, and are handed on only in the context of a community which keeps them alive.”<sup>11</sup> And, at least on a national level, these charisms seem to flourish.

But as the traditions continue, the charisms surface, and communities in need are nurtured, was the spirit of the individual Knight of Columbus being nurtured as well? The local Ramapo Valley Council #5846 of the Knights of Columbus seemed intent on charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism but appeared to have forgotten its roots as a Catholic organization striving to keep its members faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>11</sup> McCarthy, 200.



“Much of contemporary society is marked by a restless searching. People from virtually every social, political, cultural, economic and educational background are searching for depth, meaning and direction – for a reality and purpose greater than and beyond themselves, which is worthy of their commitment and their life energy.”<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps fueled by my longstanding negative impressions of the organization as well as my contemporary observations, it seemed to me that the Knights of Columbus was not responding to that need among its members. But maybe I was wrong.

For a year I attended the Knights’ meetings and, except for the required prayers, remained silent. I needed to learn the dynamic of what was transpiring both at their meetings and social activities. I needed to listen. I needed to sit with them at the bar. Feeling very much the outsider, in spite of the fact that the vast majority of members also belong to my parish, I wanted all of us to feel at ease in this relatively new setting: they had not had a chaplain for more than five years and I was new to the job. Before I said anything, I wanted them to see me as one of their own. “The Church is or should go back to being a community of God’s people, and priests, pastors and bishops who have the care of souls, are at the service of the people of God.”<sup>13</sup>

As a fellow Knight I wanted to be ‘one of the guys,’ but as their chaplain, I had a particular role to play. This balancing act would not necessarily be easy. I am not the stereotypical priest and some of the older men (as well as their wives), who only encounter me on Sundays and in sacramental functions, were not accustomed to a priest on a motorcycle who prefers not to wear a Roman collar and be addressed as “Father.”

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<sup>12</sup> McCarthy, 194.

<sup>13</sup> Eugenio Scalfari, “Interview with Pope Francis by the Founder of Italian Daily *la Repubblica*,” *L’Osservatore Romano, Weekly Edition in English*, 41, (2013), 3.

Some like the guy-next-door who is a priest and some prefer priest-on-a-pedestal. I prefer the former.

Jesus “asked his disciples this question: ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’” The disciples gave various answers but when pressed for their answer, Simon Peter answered: “You are the Messiah.” Although he approved of the insight, Jesus “strictly ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah;”<sup>14</sup> for Jesus did not want to be apart from the people he was teaching and inspiring but preferred the company of “tax collectors and offenders against the law” because he had “come to call sinners, not the self-righteous.”<sup>15</sup> I wanted to be a part of the ordinary men who were Knights and seemed to need some teaching and inspiration. My goal was to bring change from within the ranks and not as some dictum from above.

E-mails are sent on a regular basis announcing that the bar will be open and for the members to come down for the specified occasion. A Sunday afternoon or evening during the football season is a fine time to enjoy a game with other enthusiastic, if slightly inebriated, fellow Knights. This may even be a service to the wives left at home who are not saddled with cooking and having their peace disturbed by both cheers and complaints. “In our contemporary world, sports and competition are ‘safe’ and acceptable areas for men to let loose the energies of their ancestral hunter-gatherer.”<sup>16</sup>

But when an e-mail was sent announcing an open bar on the night of Good Friday, I took umbrage. Are we not a Catholic organization whose members should be

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 16: 13, 16, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Mark 2:16 – 17.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Fox, 67.

attending Church services and just maybe abstaining from alcohol and rowdy behavior on the most solemn night of the Christian liturgical year? And when it was announced that the bar would be open the night before Thanksgiving, I suggested to the membership that rather than being out drinking with the boys, they should be home helping their wives prepare the house for the company they would be welcoming the following day.

Fraternity may well be one of the pillars upon which the Knights of Columbus was founded, but let us not forget charity (which begins at home) and unity (with our families). I felt the need to challenge their status quo. I wanted to be one of the guys, but my feminist side, and my sense of fairness, needed to be expressed as well. I was taking the opportunity to remind these husbands “egalitarianism is the proper relationship with the beloved.”<sup>17</sup>

The meetings always end with prayer requests which the membership calls out and which are duly noted in the minutes and recounted at the next session. I asked the membership if these intentions mean anything to them. Do they actually remember these prayer requests and lift them up during the ensuing month? Do they pray for one another’s intentions or is this merely a formal exercise that has been part of format of Knights of Columbus meetings since time in memoriam?

While our spiritualities are necessarily grounded in tradition, postmodern consciousness has made us keenly aware of the particularities of context and circumstance which have fostered the traditions. We cannot simply import a tradition or a part of a tradition as it existed in another place and time and expect it to be effective in fostering spiritual depth in our current circumstances. We need to understand tradition as a living reality, to uncover the original intentions of a tradition and its practices, and to discover the ways and means by which the original intentions can be served in the present context.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Matthew Fox, 61.

<sup>18</sup> McCarthy, 199.

It was clear to me that something needed to be done. I was either going to take my role as chaplain seriously and ameliorate the situation or I was going to exacerbate the situation by doing nothing and allowing the Ramapo Valley Council of the Knights of Columbus to fulfill my preconceived notion that it was indeed “a phony baloney Catholic drinking club.” I needed to begin talking to Knights who had faith commitments and little interest in the bar, for “authentic spiritualities are marked by a sense of obedience to something or someone larger than and beyond oneself,”<sup>19</sup> and among some of the Knights at least, there had to be a longing for something more. Surely I was not alone.

Immediately I found signs of hope. I asked one long-time member why he attends the meetings. He sighed and admitted that he asks himself the same question; oftentimes thinks that he should stop attending; but holds on to a hope that things will change and get better. He had joined not because he had nothing to do but because he wanted to share his faith journey with other men – and thus far, that had not happened. I asked another member who served as Grand Knight why he no longer attended the meetings. He admitted that he should, but the organization was not feeding him, as he would like it to. I had found two allies! The seeds of a project were being sown.

For too many Catholics, religious education ends with the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation. Since the National Conference of Catholic Bishops has never issued guidelines for its reception, Confirmation may be conferred as early as the second grade and as late as high school. There are many Catholic adults whose religious formation ended with grammar school. Someone who is an adult physically, emotionally, psychologically and academically cannot rely on or witness to a faith that is childish at

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<sup>19</sup> McCarthy, 201.

least and adolescent at best. No wonder that the average Catholic is ill equipped in any discussion of religion.

Jesus called fishermen to follow him but before he could send them out two by two to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God, he had to teach them. “With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.”<sup>20</sup>

And it was no easy task for Jesus to teach those who evidently were uneducated men. In his frustration he asked “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?”<sup>21</sup> Rather than give up on the men of the Knights of Columbus for their seeming lack of spirituality, weak religious commitment, and spotty knowledge of their faith, I had to become like Christ the teacher. I needed to train them; give them the knowledge and spiritual equipment to know and understand their faith; and empower them to give witness to it whenever and wherever the opportunity presented itself. “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?”<sup>22</sup> I knew that at least two of the members would be willing to walk this journey of faith with me and a very important third was about to approach me.

The bi-annual changing of officers had recently taken place. For the first time in my years as chaplain, the new Grand Knight made an appointment to see me. He had

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<sup>20</sup> Mark 4: 33 – 34.

<sup>21</sup> John 14: 8b.

<sup>22</sup> Romans 10: 14.

made arrangements with one of the aforementioned members called the *Lecturer* to conduct “an evening of reflection, something we haven’t done in years.” He also requested that the installation of officers take place in the Church House with the reception to follow at the Knights Hall. In my almost fourteen years in Oakland, this had never before happened. The District Deputy, who was also a local member, commented to me how glad he was that the installation would be taking place in the sanctuary. He also told me how “awesome” he thought my men’s breakfasts and dinners had been. I was being filled with hope.

In almost every way the Knights of Columbus is a microcosm of the Church itself. It clings to the ways things used to be and hesitates to change anything. The meetings are conducted by the Grand Knight according to a universal script and as such are stunted and staid. The District Deputy had also commented to me that he was sure that at the installation of officers I would stray from my prescribed script, something I have never hesitated to do at Mass. When I suggested yet again that ‘some of these things need to change and be updated’ he responded: “that’ll never happen.”

The membership of the Knights also reflects membership in the Church: the most stalwart members are World War II Veterans with a generous supply of those old enough to have fought in or remember Korea or Vietnam; there are some men in their fifties, fewer in their forties, fewer still in their thirties. Some sons have joined, at the behest of their fathers, but do not participate - just as these same sons were confirmed but are not active in, or even present to, the Church.

The Knights of Columbus may have a membership drive every year, speaking at all the weekend Masses, but if the younger men are not there to hear the message, they

are not going to be inspired to join the group. And if they ask a member why they should join, they need what I needed: a better answer than *the life insurance policy and a cheap bar*. “The laity is also called to a central role in the work of evangelization – each baptized person’s communion with Christ leads to mission, and that mission is directed toward bringing others into communion.”<sup>23</sup> We cannot proclaim what we do not know, and like every other Christian, the Knight of Columbus must be open to a lifetime of learning.

There are many young families who are registered members of the parish. In turn many of them enroll their children in Religious Education and Sacramental Programs. To a great extent, their participation in these programs, as well as social events in the parish, do not translate into an active worship/spiritual/community life. For all intents and purposes they belong to the parish without belonging to the parish. Some are members of a Church without embracing everything the Church proclaims, while others feel they can pick and choose what they will believe. “This breakdown of frameworks of meaning has led some to retreat into entrenched positions and others into directionless wandering. Many search for a larger sense of meaning, for a more adequate grounding, for some alternative to a naïve, simplistic piety on the one hand or a religious fanaticism on the other.”<sup>24</sup>

The Knights of Columbus has to ask itself the same questions. What do the members believe, and how do they need to express that belief in ways that are both

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<sup>23</sup> Carl Anderson, *A Civilization of Love: What Every Catholic Can Do to Transform the World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 53.

<sup>24</sup> McCarthy, 195.

traditional and brand new? I am a proponent of people being able to think, something that the Catholic Church has not always encouraged.

Like the Church itself, the Knights of Columbus needs to recognize the diversity of its membership and welcome the challenges and richness that it brings. When a guest from a neighboring council took the floor at a local meeting and began to decry the evils of “gay marriage,” one of the members privately (unfortunately, not publicly) condemned his “hate mongering” and reminded him that God loves everyone. There is room in both the Church and the Knights of Columbus for divergent opinions.

Neither the societal situations nor attitudes toward the Church in 1882 are the same as they are in 2013, and while “spirituality is not a free-floating amorphous reality that emerges *sui generis*...(it) is, indeed, a fundamental aspect of our human beingness, (and) its appearance and expression is always in the form of practices and experiences that are grounded in a tradition.”<sup>25</sup> Yet traditions need to question themselves and exclude no one in the process. The Church’s teaching on marriage and divorce as well as changing attitudes towards marriage and divorce and single parents, etc. are obviously a discussion well worth undertaking. What do we believe? Why do we believe it? Are we allowed to think outside the box of what we have always been taught? Do we even want to? The Church does not necessarily reflect society but nonetheless, the Church is part of society and its members are affected by it.

One of the basic needs of human beings is to belong; yet belonging must be something more than a membership card and dues paid. It had to be for me. Belonging must bring with it a purpose, and belonging to a Catholic organization – any faith-based

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<sup>25</sup> McCarthy, 197.



organization – must keep faith in God, growth in the spiritual life at its very core. Otherwise it becomes like any other civic organization that is committed to doing good things without ever nourishing the spirit of its members. “Catholicity is the essence and central idea of the institution. The sentiment of religion pervades all its ceremonies. The great mysteries of life and death, accountability to God, a future life – all these facts are kept constantly before the mind of the brothers.”<sup>26</sup> Maybe that was true when Thomas Cummings (born 1856) was elected to National Office in the Knights of Columbus in 1893, but that is not the present reality.

Why belong to the Knights of Columbus, as opposed to the Elks or any other philanthropic organization? How to recall the spiritual nature of this worldwide Catholic organization of men and direct its efforts to a Christian renewal of its members and the Church of which it is a part? How to awaken in the membership of this local council of the Knights of Columbus who they can be in the light and love of Christ? Even among the most irreligious of members, there had to be a longing that transcended belonging to just another civic organization.

Here we must recall that Jesus’ story is that of God’s Christ who was dead but is risen. It is not just a story that culminates in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, as narrated in the gospels. It is the story that continues in the history of the Church, in the life of the community to whom Christ returns always. Jesus’ story is but the start of a story, which both retells his story and extends it in an indeterminate fashion, producing ever new, non-identical repetitions. For each Christian life aims to be the life of Jesus in its own circumstance.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas H. Cummings, “Gentlemen in Fraternity,” *Donahoe’s Magazine*, XXXIII, November 1895, 1240.

<sup>27</sup> Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story: Bible Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 214.

Jesus began his ministry by calling others to follow him. These disciples found new purpose for themselves in the person of Jesus and after his death, resurrection and ascension took seriously his mandate to “go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation.”<sup>28</sup> The disciples then stayed together, accepted the gift of the Holy Spirit,<sup>29</sup> brought others into their fold and continued the mission of Jesus both in word and in deed. This is the same call given to and accepted by the Knights of Columbus in three of their founding principles: charity, unity and fraternity. Like the disciples and the nascent Church they were establishing, “By proclaiming the nobility of the American-Catholic experience and by conspicuously avoiding any association with the Old World, the Knights of Columbus are a classic instance of a minority’s drive to assimilate into the larger society.”<sup>30</sup>

I did not want to fall into the trap of being one of “those who lead and would study their faith communities (and) inevitably participate in the very myopia they seek to remedy through research.”<sup>31</sup> I was aware of how my “own story intersects with the narrative of concern or opportunity and the multiple narratives that engage with it.”<sup>32</sup> I already knew that some of my misgivings and questions about the Knights of Columbus resonated with some of the members and that my hopes and dreams for them (and for the Church) were also shared, so that a redirection and perhaps transformation might become

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<sup>28</sup> Mark 16: 15.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 2: 4.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher J. Kauffman, 71.

<sup>31</sup> Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry* (Louisville: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 74.

<sup>32</sup> Savage and Presnell, 74.

a reality and not merely a proposal. “The humble journey of listening to the religious and spiritual lives of people through pastoral ethnography can lead to a place of life-giving change within a faith community and beyond it.”<sup>33</sup>

I may, in a sense, be a shepherd, but I do not think that today’s Catholic, today’s Knight of Columbus is a sheep who needs to be told what to do or how to be by someone who condescendingly thinks he knows better; but the Knight can be inspired and challenged to examine himself, his motives and his faith by someone ‘who is in their midst as one who serves.’<sup>34</sup>

I have always understood that as a priest and pastor I have “the responsibility to speak wisely and fairly, to exercise power *with* the people, helping people find voice, rather than speaking *for them*, or exercising power *over* them.”<sup>35</sup> “Ethnography is a way of immersing yourself in the life of a people in order to learn something about and from them. Ethnography as a pastoral practice involves opening yours eyes and ears to understand the ways in which people practice their faith.”<sup>36</sup> Or in this situation, how they did not practice their faith.

And so like some of the people who listened to Jesus, the Knights have sometimes resented what I have said, but like Jesus, I have not separated my life from their lives and, as such, wanted to call them to reexamine who they were as Christian individuals and as a Catholic fraternal organization. As proven by the experience of the Apostle Thomas when he questioned the bodily resurrection of Jesus, faith cannot be lived in solitude, for

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<sup>33</sup> Moschella, 237.

<sup>34</sup> Luke 22: 27.

<sup>35</sup> Moschella, 239.

<sup>36</sup> Moschella, 4.

by its very nature, it is lived in community (John 20: 25). The members of society may increasingly see themselves as isolated individuals but it is precisely because of that, that the Knights of Columbus, indeed the members of any Church or Church-related organization, need to be reminded that Jesus called us into community.

For generations the Catholic laity was not empowered. They were expected to be sheep. Many were pleased to be told what to do and some still seek parishes where ‘Father Knows Best,’ and where the Pastor actually believes that. I am convinced that there are those who find it too difficult to think and prefer someone to think for them. This project with the Knights of Columbus, of examining how it could be a viable vehicle not only of community service, but of deepening the spirituality and faith commitment of its members, could also be an educative process by which more of the laity in the Church could assume their rightful ownership and position within it. Leadership needs to be culled in the Church, not because of the dwindling numbers of priests but because by virtue of our baptism, all are called to share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Since Christ in His mission from the Father is the fountain and source of the whole apostolate of the Church, the success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity’s living union with Christ. For the Lord has said “He who abides in me, and I in him, he bears much fruit: for without me you can do nothing” (John 15: 5). This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is nourished by spiritual aids which are common to all the faithful, especially active participation in the sacred liturgy. These are to be used by the laity in such a way that while properly fulfilling their secular duties in the ordinary conditions of life, they do not disassociate union with Christ from that life.<sup>37</sup>

Evidently some of the Knights of Columbus neither understood their membership in this Catholic fraternal organization as, nor even wanted it to be, a “spiritual aid.” Ways had to be implemented so that they could begin to understand and accept that it is. Their

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<sup>37</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (Washington: The America Press, 1966), 493.

personal and collective renewal could have effects far beyond the walls of their meeting hall and empower them to be leaders in the Church who in turn inspire others to embrace the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “Great religious leaders are women and men who discern a prophetic call to change the world.”<sup>38</sup> I did not want necessarily to “change the world,” but I did want to change the current situation of and with the Knights of Columbus.

“The art of leading change is a mysterious and unpredictable endeavor,”<sup>39</sup> but I knew that I would be open to and welcome the insights and opinions of the membership. I had a very nebulous idea of what form the project would take but it would not be able to crystalize until I heard from the membership.

In order to achieve the tasks of practical and pastoral theology we need to engage in a process of retrieval, critique, and reconstruction. This enables us to garner the riches and wisdom of the past without seeking refuge in a thoughtless reproduction of the past. A method of retrieval, critique, and reconstruction encourages and facilitates the reframing and recasting of treasures from the past in ways which are fitting, lively, and meaningful in the contemporary context.<sup>40</sup>

Some of the men were doubtless still caught up in the Baltimore Catechism of their Catholic grammar school days of the 1940s and 1950s, and the good old days before the social upheaval of the 1960s, but I was determined to bring them into the twenty-first century. We could build on the past but not return there; we could forge a new future by examining the present.

This project, dedicated to the spiritual renewal of the Knights of Columbus, would have its “rootedness in tradition coupled with openness to the new, and” hopefully bring

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<sup>38</sup> Moschella, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Moschella, 241.

<sup>40</sup> McCarthy, 202.

“a sense of deep inner peace”<sup>41</sup> both to the membership of Ramapo Valley Council #5846 of the Knights of Columbus and their intrepid chaplain.

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<sup>41</sup> McCarthy, 200.

### Chapter III

#### THE PROJECT: DESIGNED AND EXECUTED

**When you became a Knight,  
what were your expectations of the organization?**

More involvement by the chaplain -  
looking more like a priest and not like a biker.<sup>65</sup>

The ministry of Jesus was both for and with people. Although the Gospels report many things that Jesus said and did, it is also true that Jesus listened. Jesus gave the people what they wanted but he also provided what they needed. The paralyzed man was lowered through the roof in order to by-pass the crowd that surrounded Jesus (Luke 5: 17 – 26) and Jesus forgave the man his sins: what he needed; but then Jesus gave the man what he wanted: to be able to get up and walk. Jesus knew that Zacchæus (Luke 19: 1 – 10) needed his presence in his life, in his home, but once he arrived there, he listened to what the short man had to say.

From my vantage point, I knew what I *thought* the Knights of Columbus needed and needed to be. I could have pointed out any number of ways in which I thought they were misguided and not any different from any other men's civic organizations, in spite of the fact that they herald themselves as an organization for Catholic men - only. Theoretically called not only to live their faith but to give witness to it, I did not think

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<sup>65</sup> Anonymous response to Question Six of the questionnaire.

that they, as individuals, were equipped to do that. I was actually certain that they were not at all interested in doing that.

Many of the members were Catholic by way of apparent affiliation, with their wives being Catholic by way of practice. In order to address and ultimately ameliorate the situation, I had to both create and provide a forum in which to find out. Before I could teach, I needed to listen. Before I could do ministry *for* the Knights of Columbus, I needed to do ministry *with* the Knights of Columbus. The project that I would design and execute needed my leadership as well as the Knights' input. "Ultimately, men are not 'problems to be solved' but deep, impenetrable mysteries. Each one of us carries many stories, many ancestors, many metaphors, and many archetypes in often hidden places. We are diverse. There is no single 'man problem.'"<sup>66</sup> I had to mine the situation, find answers to my questions and create a project that would be life giving and spirit enhancing. And since the Knights, unified as they are by way of religious preference, are diverse, the forum to be created would have to permit these differences to surface.

As Jesus appointed the Twelve from the midst of many disciples (Mark 3: 14) to assist him in his work as valuable resources (John 6: 9) and extensions of himself (Luke 10: 1 – 8), the first order of business was to create the Lay Advisory Committee.

My first obvious choice was Kevin B., the sitting (at the time) Grand Knight of the local council. Kevin is a lifelong resident of Oakland. His father had been a Knight of Columbus, so like me, the Knights had always been a part of his life. One becomes a Grand Knight only after having served in lesser positions in the council, so Kevin was

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<sup>66</sup> Matthew Fox, xxvii.



well known and respected by the membership, having been active for many years. With his finger firmly on the pulse of the council, he would have valuable input.

I also knew that his support of the project would be one of the keys to its acceptance by the membership-at-large. I also saw him as the stereotypical Catholic male and Knight of Columbus: his words spoke more loudly than his actions. As Grand Knight, he said that he had a personal desire for more specifically religious activity in the council, yet he nominally practices his faith. He is one of my parishioners, but because he rarely comes to Mass and never participates in any parish activities, I did not know him well, something I thought would be beneficial.

My next two choices were simple ones. Kevin S. is the former Grand Knight whom I had questioned about his absence from all things-Knights. Since he wanted the organization to nourish his spirit – and it was not – I correctly surmised that he would be eager to be part of a project to lead the Knights in a new direction. He is a devoted Catholic and decidedly contemporary with his views and open mind.

But Kevin S. was not always an active Catholic. Although he had had his children baptized, he was not raising them in faith. He is an extremely well paid executive and his family has everything that money can buy. The tragedy of September 11, 2001 was a conversion experience for him. He suddenly recognized how fleeting life could be and how futile mere possessions were. The fear of God was instilled in him and he brought his family to church and there they have stayed. His life completely changed and he has become an evangelizer not only among his siblings, but in every social situation in which he finds himself. Kevin S. was delighted that he could play a role in the religious formation of the Knights of Columbus. As the project unfolded, he would personally

remind various members that an activity was to take place and that they should be certain to attend. He recorded all of the presentations and when neither he, nor his “computer geek” son Brian, was able to get a computer program to translate the spoken word into print, he convinced his wife Pat to transcribe it manually for me. (She told me how much she enjoyed doing it, that it was like reading a great novel she could not put down.) Kevin S. is the opposite of Kevin B.: the former always comes to worship but is (was) never present to the Knights of Columbus, whereas the latter rarely comes to worship, but is always present to everything the Knights does. These two men alone would give a good balance to the Lay Advisory Committee.

I had also questioned Cecil G. why he attended the spiritually vapid and seemingly pointless monthly meetings of the Knights of Columbus. He had expressed his hopes that things would change. Cecil consistently makes it very clear that he became a Knight because he believed that at the Knights’ Hall, he would find other men with whom to walk on his journey of faith. “Places that provide the spaces, reasons and opportunities for people to come together, to share their passions, hopes, and troubles, will be healthier, stronger places where people trust and care about each other.”<sup>67</sup> Thus far he had been disappointed.

When Kevin B. became Grand Knight he asked Cecil, in his role as Lecturer, to host a “Spirituality Night” of some sort. Cecil agreed and promptly solicited my participation. He was thus an obvious choice for membership on the LAC and his presence on it would be valuable.

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<sup>67</sup> Timothy Beatley, *Native to Nowhere: Sustaining Home and Community in a Global Age* (Washington: Island Press, 2004), 5.

Cecil is a deeply religious man and active in my parish. He is the founder of the Men's Prayer Group, he has served on several Cornerstone Teams, he participates in my Bible Studies (first The Genesis Group and now the Exodus Group) and he and his wife are at every parish social function as well.

This is made all the more profound because Cecil was raised Jewish. As a high school student, he began to search for Christ. He saw something in his high school sweetheart (now wife) that he wanted for himself. He still insists that Carmella is the greatest image of Christ-like love he has ever encountered. As a man who has had a long and challenging spiritual journey, he would bring with him not just a certain religious and ethnic diversity, but a desire to awaken other men to the presence of Christ in their lives. Unlike the opposites of Kevin B. and Kevin S., Cecil is present to everything parish and everything Knights of Columbus.

Brian S. is the Youth Minister for my parish. He had been prevailed upon to join the Knights of Columbus, but feeling awkwardly young amid an aging council, he rarely participated in anything they sponsored. But more than that, as a very vocal politically and religiously liberal individual, he subsequently refused to pay his dues to an organization that actively and financially supported efforts to keep marriage between one man and one woman. (On their wedding day, his wife had one of her gay friends serve as her "Man of Honor.") He felt that both his youth (he just turned 30) and attitudes had no place in the Knights of Columbus; I knew he would bring an interesting mix to the Lay Advisory Committee, being half the age of most of the members. "Passion in the young is not always wrong, and neither is their moral judgment. Nor is the caution and perspective

of elders always right. Both need each other, though. They need to remain open and receptive to the other, unafraid to fly and unafraid to learn.”<sup>68</sup>

Unlike me, who was raised very religiously and never had a faith crisis or a time away from the Church, Brian was brought up by parents who rarely took their children to Mass, and this suited him just fine. As a Confirmation Candidate, he was required to perform service hours and one of the options was to play with his parish “Folk Group.” This was the beginning of his religious awakening that culminated in his attending a Catholic College, majoring in Religious Studies and embarking upon a career as a Youth Minister. He can relate to our Confirmation Candidates who are forced to participate in the parish sacramental program but who have no interest in being practicing Catholics. He understands their parents since they are like his own. Because of his loyalty to and friendship with me, and because he genuinely wanted to see concrete change in the Knights of Columbus, he readily agreed to join the Lay Advisory Committee.

In the relatively homogeneously white town of Oakland, racial diversity on the Lay Advisory Committee would be difficult to achieve. There are no African-American members of the local council of the Knights of Columbus, but one active member, who is also a past Grand Knight, was born in the Philippines. I shuddered at the thought of tokenism. If Romeo J. were just another Caucasian Knight of Columbus, would I ask him to be a member of the Lay Advisory Committee? Probably not, but there had to be more to Romeo than his race.

In my experience, Filipinos are not “othered” the way many other racial and national groups are. Their academic achievements, their facility with English, their

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<sup>68</sup> Matthew Fox, 42.

willingness to assimilate with the general American population, their easy charm and friendliness, as well as their light skin pigment, result in their readily being accepted by everyone. Yet these observations are, in essence, demeaning of a fascinating, multi-lingual culture. Romeo and his wife, as Americanized as they are, love their heritage and when given the opportunity, speak to their fellows in their native Tagalog. Romeo is also very socially and religiously conservative and as such, I saw him as representative of a certain segment of the Knights of Columbus. He was happy to be asked to join the Lay Advisory Committee.

There is no such thing as a female Knight of Columbus, but in contemporary society (and even in the Church) any group that is lacking women and their perspective is immediately diminished. So I needed a female member, but one who would be more than the token woman on the Committee.

Patricia S.'s late husband had been a Grand Knight. Her adult son is a lapsed member of the local council as well as a rarely practicing Catholic whose children go through the motions of religious education and sacramental preparation. As a Lady Knight, she still participates in functions that permit the attendance of women, e.g. the annual Communion Breakfast. As an active parishioner and very personable individual, I know Pat rather well and like her very much. Both the Knights of Columbus as well as the Lay Advisory Committee know her, so she would be an easy fit.

Pat would prove to be the most helpful member regarding the nuts and bolts of the project (she prepared every mailing with me and served as courier to the Post Office) but she was also the most challenging member. She looked back with affection on the days when the Knights of Columbus was more family-oriented.

As we began to meet to discuss the project, she became quite vocal. She had very clear ideas about what the Knights of Columbus should be and was quite critical of what the Knights of Columbus, in her estimation, had become. Although a contemporary church woman, her image of the Knights of Columbus was frozen in ‘the good old days,’ when life was seemingly simpler, when every Catholic followed the rules and Grand Knights with their wives and children, celebrated family unity at State Conventions.

As I tried to keep the focus, narrowing the scope of what we could possibly achieve, Pat insistently tried to make the project more inclusive. She wanted to address everything from dues (which she thought were too expensive) to kid-friendly social events (presumably to give her grandchildren the same experience her children had) to the lack of spirituality and religious practice that she saw endemic to the situation. I loved her enthusiasm and willingness to be part of the Lay Advisory Committee, but we had to keep the focus narrower than she would have liked.

I explained to each member individually what were my basic ideas for the project; I knew their collective input would both alter and enhance what I had in mind. I planned that our first LAC meeting would necessarily be one of evaluation of the local council of the Knights of Columbus as well as our hopes for its future. “Is our work sustaining us and our community? *A job* provides a paycheck and economic survival, but the work we are meant to do, which may be the reason we are here on this planet, will provide more.”<sup>69</sup> My work, in conjunction with the Lay Advisory Committee, for this particular community must enhance the work (read: purpose) of the Knights of Columbus and ultimately redirect its work in the upcoming years. “Father McGivney did not want

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<sup>69</sup> Matthew Fox, 76.

religion to be a banished subject from any parts of the lives of Catholic men, least of all something as crucial to them as their fraternal societies.”<sup>70</sup> We were planning to bring religion back to the front burner of the Ramapo Valley Council #5846 of the Knights of Columbus, but would the membership want to turn on the power?

The first order of business was the selection of a Chairperson. Both Kevin S. and Cecil G. immediately expressed interest. Then they began to defer to each other: Who would do the better job? With Kevin S.’s job oftentimes taking him out of town, would Cecil be a better choice? Whom did I want to be the Chair? I was delighted that two of the members were so enthusiastic about being the Chairs, that I suggested we have Co-Chairs. With that having been so quickly decided, we proceeded to the next order of business.

We all agreed that there was a lack of spirituality in the Knights of Columbus. We believed that the membership wanted more than what was being offered: they wanted more than the cheap bar and the large, flat-screen television set for football games. We knew what we thought, but we had to find out what the men actually thought.

I brought up the possibility of interviewing every member. I spoke to them about “Appreciative Inquiry.” I wanted to keep things positive and not approach things as though we had decided upon a problem that needed correction. None of the members was interested in conducting interviews; they felt that they had neither the time nor the expertise to do it. With more than two hundred members enrolled, individual interviews by me would be impossible and group interviews did not seem ideal. Thus we decided on

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<sup>70</sup> Douglas Brinkley and Julie M. Fenster, *Parish Priest: Father McGivney and American Catholicism*, 102.

a questionnaire that would be sent to every member (see Appendix A), along with a letter explaining the project (see Appendix B).

We began to formulate the letter. This was actually monumental for me. As a public figure, I covet my privacy; and this would be the first time I announced to anyone other than close family members or friends, that I was working on this degree program. I was also concerned that the membership might feel as though they were guinea pigs, part of my personal religious experiment. The Lay Advisory Committee believed my concerns to be unfounded as they felt that their enthusiasm for the project would be shared by everyone.

The respondents had the opportunity to remain anonymous, although I did not think any of the questions would require answers of a sensitive nature. The questions were very basic: How long have you been a Knight? Why did you become a Knight? What were your expectations of the organization and have those expectations been met? Based upon the four tenets of the Knights of Columbus, I asked which one they thought to be the most important. I looked forward to their answers, for I had my view of the Knights of Columbus and now I would find out what the membership itself thought.

The next part of the questionnaire would determine the topics of the five teachings: what did they want to learn more about? We provided suggestions as well as the opportunity to note their own particular interests.

Both for clarity and simplicity, I wanted to keep everything to one page. Multiple pages may have seemed daunting to older members and too-busy younger members. On the other hand, a lengthy questionnaire would have resulted in too much information to be gleaned and collated by the Lay Advisory Committee. A one-page letter with a one-



page, ten-question questionnaire with a stamped self-addressed envelope enclosed was certainly within every Knight's capability to read, complete and return.

Famous last words: of the almost two hundred that were sent, fifty-five were returned; a little more than twenty-five percent of the membership responded. The almost seventy-five percent who did not respond demonstrated to me their disinterest in either the Knights of Columbus in general, or faith formation opportunities in particular. Nonetheless the entire membership would be invited to each activity as it approached. If it is true that "the modern world is full of tribal groups, so that the weight of tribal expulsion weighs as heavily on us as ever,"<sup>71</sup> I was puzzled by the Knights' willingness to exclude themselves from being with the rest of the "tribe."

Although the implications of it could last for years, and the skills I would learn from both its preparation and execution would be invaluable, the project itself had to be finite. I proposed the dates of each session, all of which would take place during the six weeks of the Lenten Season. The Lay Advisory Committee approved the dates that I proposed; there would be four dates and five teachings. It was now the membership's responsibility to determine the topic of the teachings; I would determine the content.

My belief that the Knights of Columbus was a microcosm of both the Catholic Church and society itself was quickly proven to be true. The members' interests and questions were no different from my own and, like me, they were not hesitant to cite some hot button issues. "The Knights, like the American Church, included liberals and conservatives, transformationists and preservationists. However, the leadership of the Knights and the Church throughout the 1960s and '70s still tended to be socially

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<sup>71</sup> Matthew Fox, 54.

progressive, and culturally and ecclesiastically conservative.”<sup>72</sup> I would soon have proof that the more things change the more they stay the same *in the Knights of Columbus*.

I had assigned a date by which the members were to return the questionnaires and once that date was achieved, I called a meeting of the Lay Advisory Committee. We opened up the envelopes and began to collate the information.

Respondents had been Knights of Columbus for anywhere between three and fifty-nine years. The next two questions focused on how the member saw himself as a Knight and as a Catholic. Fourteen of the respondents said that they were “very active” Knights while twenty-two said they were “very active” Catholics. Twenty-five Knights said that they were “somewhat active” members of the Council with twenty-three claiming that description as Catholics. “Rarely active” Knights numbered fourteen with nine saying that they were also “rarely active” Catholics. Only two said they were “lapsed” Knights and one said he no longer practiced his faith. While these statistics do not seem disparate, it was telling that some “very active” Knights were “rarely active” Catholics. Since 1886, the Knights of Columbus’ “qualifications for membership included the stipulation that one must be a ‘Practical Roman Catholic.’”<sup>73</sup>

As I had long suspected, being Catholic was not important in the mind of every Knight of Columbus, and whereas the Knights of Columbus is specifically Catholic, some “very active” Catholics did not seem to find much value in being a Knight. It seemed that there were more Kevin S.’s and Cecil G.’s out there, men who wanted some spiritual development in the organization. Perhaps this project could succeed in bringing

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<sup>72</sup> Christopher J. Kauffman, 415.

<sup>73</sup> Christopher J. Kauffman, 60.

faith, religion and spirituality to the fore and result in every Knight believing it was important to live his Catholic faith. “Across the Church, closed-boundary men’s groups are springing up in local parishes, with the support of pastors and other caregivers. It is within these new communities of men seeking a more supportive and sensitive identity that mutuality and love are being worked through in new ways.”<sup>74</sup>

The Four Degrees (read: Tenets) of the Knights of Columbus are Fraternity, Charity, Unity and Patriotism. As is the case with every organization that has a variety of goals, it seems that one is always made to suffer because of emphasis placed on another one. The responses told us how the members primarily *saw* the Knights of Columbus versus what they *thought* the Knights of the Columbus should be.

Although founder Michael J. McGivney specified patriotism as one of the principles of the Knights of Columbus, none of the respondents said the organization is or should be primarily a patriotic one. (This answer was curious since the most money the council raises for any endeavor is for the Wounded Warrior Project – another incongruity.)

Twenty-four said that it is indeed a fraternal organization with only eleven saying that it should be. Fourteen claimed that the Knights is a charitable organization while twenty-four said it should become one. Thirteen stated that the Knights is indeed a religious organization with sixteen saying that that is what it should be. Interestingly two members who identify themselves as “lapsed” or “rarely active Catholics” said that the Knights of Columbus *should* be a religious organization while nine members who cited fraternity or charity as the primary missions of the group claimed to be either “not active”

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<sup>74</sup> Philip L. Culbertson, “The Spirituality of Men” in *The Spirituality of Men: Sixteen Christians Write About Their Faith*, ed. Philip L. Culbertson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 235.

or “inconsistent” Catholics. Apparently it is a value for some to be part of a fraternal organization that practices charity (love of neighbor) but not to be part of a Church (community) that preaches it. “Men’s spirituality reaches its height when it shows compassion to all people, beginning with those close to us. It is not about I, me, and mine. It is about us, we, and them. It is about participation in building God’s commonwealth of love and justice.”<sup>75</sup> My perceived disconnect between the Catholic organization of the Knights of the Columbus and the organized Catholic Church was seemingly being proved true.

Not every responding member answered the next questions. When asked what were their expectations of the Knights of Columbus when they joined, most said that they wanted to do charitable work and build relationships with other men of similar beliefs. Most said that these expectations were met at least somewhat. One lapsed Catholic said that his expectations were now met because I was embarking upon this project. Some who did not cite any expectations said that those expectations had been met and some who said that they had no expectations said that they were not met! One member’s expectations were not met because ‘the atheism brought into the schools by Madelaine (sic) Murray O’Hare had not been eliminated;’ another Knight did not find his prayer life supported and the aforementioned member who wanted involvement by a more priestly and less motorcyclist chaplain had also been met with disappointment. (Perhaps his opinion has since changed.)

Thus far, the information gleaned from the membership showed a variety of opinions and demonstrated that they seemed to be as confused as I was regarding the purpose and

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<sup>75</sup> Gareth Brandt, 201.

goals of the Knights of Columbus. The next two questions would now provide the basis for the teachings and presentations of the Project and hopefully serve to clarify the members' vision: what they wanted to learn more about would provide direction not only for me, but help to redefine the organization for them. This would be key for their decision-making both as Catholic men and responsible members of society.

Although I had provided suggestions as to what Church Teachings they might like to know more about, e.g. Marriage (traditional as well as same sex), the discipline of clerical celibacy in the Catholic Church or Capital Punishment,<sup>76</sup> they were also eager to provide their own answers/questions. Secondly, as Catholic men, active or not, what practices or beliefs needed clarification or study that moved beyond what they had learned in Religious Education Classes as children but had not had any updating since, e.g. Scripture, Eternal Life (Heaven, Hell, Purgatory or Limbo), Sacraments (particularly the Eucharist) or the Saints. Again there was an opportunity for them to move beyond the suggestions I had made. The results as tallied by the Lay Advisory Committee and me surprised us all.

One of the many criticisms made of Catholics and the Catholic Church is that Catholics do not read (or know) the Bible. Whether or not that statement and its questionable validity had anything to do with the members' responses is anyone's guess, but the topic of greatest interest was Scripture. Eighteen respondents noted it as the most important topic. They wanted to know more about the Inspired Word of God! Maybe this could be a primer to get some of the men to open their Bible, something, I would soon discover, not all of them even owned.

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<sup>76</sup> One member had once argued with me that it was not inconsistent for him to support capital punishment while opposing abortion.

As a boy growing up Catholic, I understood celibacy for the priests as a given. My role models were neither my father nor my elder brother. I admired our parish priests and wanted to be just like them. “Celibacy does not ordinarily begin with practice, but with the formation of an image of celibacy, often personified in one person believed to be a practicing celibate.”<sup>77</sup> Even as seminarians we never discussed it, either among ourselves or as topic in our Reflection Groups. It was an accepted reality: to be a priest meant we would neither date nor marry. I thought that all Catholics approached the issue the same way I did (and do). I was wrong.

Many people – Catholics and non-Catholics alike – believe that there would not be a sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church if its priests were allow to marry. Many see that the clergy of most religions marry with no detriment to their dedication to ministry. Or perhaps some remember God’s statement that “it is not good for the man to be alone”<sup>78</sup> and question the value and validity of this age-old Catholic Church teaching. “Because of the abuse and corruption of celibacy in the Middle Ages, reformers such as Martin Luther worked hard to suggest that celibate monasticism was not an appropriate way of life for Christians. This negative attitude toward celibacy has continued, especially in our sex-saturated culture.”<sup>79</sup> In any event, seventeen respondents cited “Celibacy/Married Clergy” as the most important topic to be discussed as the Project unfolded. This “given” is being discussed and questioned by many Catholics and these particular Catholics wanted to know more.

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<sup>77</sup> A. W. Richard Sipe, “Celibacy Today: Mystery, Myth, and Miasma,” *Cross Currents* 57 (Winter 2007): 546.

<sup>78</sup> Genesis 2: 18.

<sup>79</sup> Gareth Brandt, 112.

One of the sessions of the Project would take place on Saint Joseph's Feast Day, March 19. Since Saint Joseph is the Patron of Men, I have oftentimes held a Men's Dinner (with a guest speaker) that had been preceded by a Mass (at which I spoke). I decided that my homily during the Knights of Columbus-only Saint Joseph's Day Mass would address the role of men in the Catholic Church. Although this had not been a topic voiced by the membership, I felt that it was incumbent upon me to address it. The topics decided thus far would be educational and by their very nature, enhance the spirit of the membership, but none of the topics specifically addressed the spirituality of men. This would be it. The presentation at the dinner would discuss the third most popular topic as determined by thirteen of the respondents: Marriage. I had originally planned to bring in a guest speaker for the dinner but changed my mind for a couple of reasons: this was my project and I should do all of the work for it; and I knew what I wanted to present and could trust myself to do it without bringing my personal opinions into the mix (something that Youth Minister and Lay Advisory Committee Member Brian thought would be quite a challenge, if not impossible).

Even though Limbo is not even mentioned in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994), the word is forever embedded in human vocabulary as well as in the Catholic psyche. The necessity of works (James 2: 14) versus salvation by God's grace through faith (Ephesians 2: 8 – 9) continues to distinguish the Catholic Church and its teachings from our Protestant brethren. Is faith in Jesus alone enough to earn someone's place in the eternal Kingdom of God? We might use the word quite frequently, but how many people believe in Hell anymore? Is Purgatory anywhere in Scripture? (2 Maccabees 12: 44, according to Catholics, who also accept the first two Books of Maccabees as

canonical). Does everyone go straight to Heaven when he/she dies - no matter what? The membership, echoing the Church-at-large, has many questions about these issues. Thus it came as no surprise that Eternal Life was cited as the most important topic by twelve of the Knights who responded to the Questionnaire, with four specifying Heaven and Purgatory and three wanting to know more about Hell and Limbo. I deemed it appropriate to address these issues at the last session that would take place on Good Friday.

The last question of the ten questions simply asked whether or not the member planned to attend any of the Project's presentations. Most said that they would, a few said they were not sure and for reasons that included living out of State and a misunderstanding about one of the members, only three said no.

I now had a committed, captive audience; men who were interested in walking together with me on a journey of faith that would both expand their religious knowledge and deepen their spirituality. This was in and of itself a major step "because men sometimes confuse religion and spirituality, and in the process run from their own journey with Spirit."<sup>80</sup> If they knew more about what the Church teaches, then perhaps they would participate more in its life and nourish their spirit. This would be a project designed by them and for them. "Male spirituality begins with specialness and individuation but leaves a legacy of compassionate community."<sup>81</sup> The Knights of Columbus already has such a legacy, but now there would be more Jesus in the community.

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<sup>80</sup> Matthew Fox, xii.

<sup>81</sup> Gareth Brandt, *Under Construction: Reframing Men's Spirituality* (Waterloo, ON, Herald Press, 2009), 202.



The five topics that would be presented on four nights were now determined and approved by the Lay Advisory Committee. My work was cut out for me. The first challenge was: how to make a cohesive and comprehensive presentation on a subject as vast as Scripture to men, some of whom had never been to a Bible Study and who sometimes listened with half an ear – if at all - to a Sunday homily. The skills that one of the Lay Advisory Committee members attributes to me would once again need to be proved: “Thomas is a natural educator. He prepares thoroughly, articulates his knowledge without being condescending or biased. He encourages audience participation and discussion.”<sup>82</sup>

Several weeks before the first “Faith Friday,” every member of Council #5846 of the Ramapo Valley Knights of Columbus received a letter inviting him to the Scripture Presentation (see Appendix C). Included was a stamped self-addressed postcard on which the member was to indicate whether or not he would be attending. I felt that the return postcard would help to indicate how seriously I was taking the project while encouraging each member to discern whether he would be present or absent. Forty postcards were returned: sixteen indicated that they would not attend; twenty-three said that they would and one postcard came back with a signature only. Several members came without having reserved a spot, and when the presentation had concluded, the participants completed twenty-seven evaluation forms.

The presentation (see Appendix D) lasted approximately ninety minutes. While disseminating information, I kept it interactive, asking questions and eliciting comments. With two Master’s degrees in Scripture, it is easy for me to speak on this topic with my

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<sup>82</sup> Cecil Glassman at the Lay Advisory Committee’s meeting with Joel Mason, May 28, 2013.

peers, but in this situation, I needed to be aware of my audience. I had to approach the subject as though they knew virtually nothing. I wanted to inform while at the same time not shock them or cause any dismay. This needed to be a primer while respecting their intelligence.

We discussed authorship, especially as it applies to the traditions that comprise the Pentateuch, and how we call what human beings wrote “The Word of the Lord.” The historicity of the Bible was another topic. To keep my male audience entertained, I had them read about the sin of David with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11: 1 – 26) and his subsequent abhorrent behavior in guaranteeing the death of Uriah. I spent some time pointing out that God always worked with imperfect people, that David was called to do great things for God, that Jesus was born of the House of David, but yet David was also a man of questionable moral principles. This allowed the men, imperfect as they are, to see their own potential as instruments of God. “All men have sinned, and far too many in our society of fractured relationships can identify with David’s sin of adultery. While this story illustrates the pain that David’s sins caused for him and his family...I don’t want some perfect, sinless man either, because he would seem unreal and impossible to relate to.”<sup>83</sup>

We discussed the formation of the Canon. I had them read slightly different versions of the same narrative as they appear in the Synoptics (Mark 10: 35 – 45 vs. Matthew 20: 20 – 28)), and asked them whether or not these differences mattered. I presented the Gospel of John and explained why we need all four of the canonical Gospels. The *Lost Gospels* were yet another topic and they enjoyed hearing some of the

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<sup>83</sup> Gareth Brandt, 50.

narratives from the Gospel of Thomas. This also gave me the opportunity to debunk the television specials that attempt to make people believe that there is this huge conspiracy to keep some vital information hidden from the faithful.

Throughout the presentation they were invited to interrupt for clarity and the evening concluded with spontaneous questions and answers. I was humbly proud of my work and the men responded with great enthusiasm. Of course it made me wonder why only one of the Knights of Columbus was part of my monthly Genesis Group.

The week after the first Faith Friday, an invitation was sent (see Appendix E) inviting the membership to the second one, during which time we would consider Celibacy and by way of appropriate, relevant tangent: Married Clergy. These mailings were now serving a dual purpose: it was updating the chapter's mailing list, which had now shrunk to about one hundred eighty members, and the men were being invited to spend time in fraternity and allow the Knights of Columbus to help them grow in spirit and in faith. "Spiritual work requires time away from the usual activities so that the heart and soul can link together for sustenance and strength. The coming together of soul and spirit is a restlessness that takes our energy and demands our time for development."<sup>84</sup>

Once again, each member received stamped, self-addressed postcard with which to respond. Although I had been told that the 'Word of Mouth' following the Scripture Presentation would result in more men coming to this second Faith Friday, only eighteen responded that they would attend and nineteen said that they could not.

Since clerical celibacy is a given in the Catholic Church, and thus a given in my life, making a presentation on the topic was new to me. Except to complain about it

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<sup>84</sup> Mike Bathum, 95.

occasionally and to sometimes make references to the fact that I am alone in life, I find it rarely brought up in conversation. I think that many Catholics are uncomfortable when a priest addresses sexuality and I am not an expert in the field. Now I was to make a major presentation in front of mostly married Catholic men.

I was determined not to approach the subject from only an academic and objective standpoint: I would share my own doubts and misgivings, something I had never done in a public forum. “The assumption seems to be that men need to be having sex to be whole and fulfilled. Another assumption is that celibate single adult males are too passive and nice, and that’s why they never get their princess.”<sup>85</sup> The Catholic Church is pietistic enough to say that the clergy are male, the Church is female, and thus the celibate priest’s princess is the Church.

Priest and bishop represent Christ, and act in this person and name, in his ministry to the Church, his bride. As a sacramental sign of Christ, there should be a natural likeness or image taken by Christ and adopted by him for use as the sacred sign of his personal ministry. Since Christ is the mystical bridegroom, who became human as a male, the action of Christ in ministering to his people – his bride – will be more aptly signified by one who is also male.<sup>86</sup>

Although I do not embrace this ideology, I would have to be careful not to disillusion any of my listeners nor make them uncomfortable with my musings on sex and celibacy. I also did not want to play it for comedy.

Framing the presentation (see Appendix F) with song and prayer, I began by sharing my experience of celibacy and my understanding of it as a seminarian and then as an ordained minister. Doubtless none of these men had ever before heard anyone discuss

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<sup>85</sup> Gareth Brandt, 112 – 113.

<sup>86</sup> David M. Maloney, *The Church Cannot Ordain Women to the Priesthood*, Synthesis Series (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978) 50.

this topic – this “given” - so openly. I enjoyed their surprise when I recounted a conversation with a faculty member (now Bishop) during my last year in the seminary that ‘I was so horny that I could not sleep.’ That story alone instantly made me more human than they had ever suspected.

I also compared my commitment as a celibate priest to their commitment as married men.

Traditionally, these states of life require resolute lifelong vows to one person or several people, because living out those vows teaches a person how to love. Scripture and the church’s wisdom both claim that love is no mere feeling, nor is it an option simply to put aside when problems come up. To paraphrase Dorothy Day, vows remind us that as Christians we are not called so much to be successful in our loving as to be faithful to God, whom we know as love.<sup>87</sup>

This began to frame the issue for them. I quoted catechisms and theologians; we examined history. I pointed out contradictions: celibate American Roman Catholic priests vs. married former Episcopalian priests who have become Catholic priests and naturally, keep their families and receive a living wage. They were not aware that there were celibate and non-celibate Catholic priests. I affirmed my having embraced celibacy while expounding on the openness of the Episcopalian Church regarding clerical sexuality.

Depending upon who says it to me and in what setting, when I am described as “unique” I sometimes respond, “you mean eunuch.” In addition to the immorality and illegality of it, the clerical sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church is all the more shocking because, in my opinion, priests are seen as non-sexual beings. Traditional cassocks and religious habits have long served to mask the physical sexuality of priests, sisters and brothers alike.

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<sup>87</sup> Jana Bennett, “Support for Celibate Singles Alongside Mongamous Married Couples and Their Children,” in *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*, ed. The Rutba House (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005), 115.

With a certain parish tradition behind it, as well as the promise of a free catered meal, thirty-nine Knights of Columbus responded in the affirmative to the invitation they received to the Saint Joseph's Men's Dinner (see Appendix G). Perhaps more of the membership was understanding the seriousness of the project and the sincerity of my intent. With nineteen declining to come, a record fifty-eight members sent back their postcards.

The men listened to two presentations that night. The first was the sermon (see Appendix H) I delivered during the Mass that was the initial evening activity. I reviewed the irony that women in roles of pastoral ministry dominate a Church that boasts an all-male hierarchy. This was a time to challenge their thinking and behavior as Catholic men. Is the average layman not involved because he is not ordained and are women so involved because it is the closest thing they have to ordination? I asked them whether or not they identified with the ordained men in ministry. How many men, ordained or not, could see themselves in the cardinals who elected Pope Francis? I certainly could not.

Men seem to respond when there is a call for grunt work around the parish, but, I asked, 'is that all we men are good for? Do we not have brains in addition to brawn?' I then gave examples taken from Matthew Fox's book, "The Hidden Spirituality of Men: Ten Metaphors to Awaken the Sacred Masculine," to wit: "Male means winning (being number one in sports, business, politics, academia), going to war ('kill or be killed'), being rational, not emotional ('boys don't cry'), and embracing homophobia (fear of male affection). Male means domination, lording over others – whether nature, one's own body, women, or others."<sup>88</sup> The hierarchy of the Catholic Church has certainly reflected

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<sup>88</sup> Matthew Fox, xxvi.

this dominance and instructed its priests to behave likewise, but it is certainly no sign of weakness on the part of the male to be in ministry *with* others. I encouraged them to see in Jesus and his apostles, masculine role models of ministry, even if their successors wear long robes and miters.

After Mass, we all went to the Knights of Columbus Hall for cocktails and dinner. Between dinner and dessert, I offered the keynote presentation of the evening: Marriage (see Appendix I). I began by asking them what they hoped I was going to cover and then embarked upon a general consideration of Sacraments in the Catholic Church before zoning in on Matrimony.

I did not remain in the realm of the theoretical or the pietistic but made them reflect on the purpose or even necessity of marriage in the Twenty-First Century. I spoke about cohabitation and, knowing several of the men had children who were in that situation, made certain not to make a judgment call, referring to my own displeasure at my nephew having moved in with his girlfriend last fall. I referred to what I call our smorgasbord approach to marriage and the wedding day, e.g. the groom cannot see the bride before she walks down the aisle even though he slept with her the night before; or the bride wants her father to give her away even though she gave herself away a long time ago.

We considered divorce as well as the Catholic phenomenon of the annulment process. We discussed sexuality and procreation and the sensitive issue of marriage between two persons of the same gender. I asked: Is marriage a right? Is marriage a civil right? I noted that if it is, then the Church was denying me my civil right.

A couple of days after the double presentations of Saint Joseph's Day, the final letter was sent to every member inviting him to our last Faith Friday to take place on the evening of Good Friday (see Appendix J). The prescribed liturgy of the Church takes place in the afternoon but once again the men were being asked to participate in something that would be uniquely their own, focusing on a topic that they themselves had selected: Eternal Life. American society is one that denies the inevitability of death and far too many people seem to think that eternal life should be eternal earthly life. "One of the chief reasons we so often deny death is the sense of separation and loneliness it suggests. Entering death may be the only thing that we absolutely must do by ourselves. Many of us masculinized men are terrified by loneliness even as we dwell there much of the time."<sup>89</sup> To remove the temptation of the bar, this presentation would also be conducted in the Church *House* and not in the Knights' Hall.

The Presentation (see Appendix K) began with several passages from Scripture wherein Jesus mentions Paradise or the Kingdom to come. Catholics, and surely many others, are confused about Christ's promises of eternal life and the reality of sin, e.g. Luke 23: 39 – 43, Mark 4: 30 – 32. I addressed the four Church traditions regarding what happens after death. The first tradition, which is no longer a teaching, was the theological concept of Limbo, followed by Purgatory, Hell and Heaven. I discussed the efficacy and necessity of Baptism as well as the Catholic Church's teaching on sacramental Absolution. We discussed sin and how it may or may not affect someone's entrance into the Kingdom of God. We also spent some time contrasting God's mercy with God's

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<sup>89</sup> Mark Muesse, "Don't Just Do Something, Sit There: Spiritual Practice and Men's Wholeness," in *The Spirituality of Men: Sixteen Christians Write about Their Faith*, ed. Philip L. Culbertson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 14.



justice. Of all the presentations in the project, this one was the most scripturally based with many references to official Catholic teaching. I hoped they were being both educated and inspired. I pointed out that as much as everyone desires to go to Heaven when they die, we are sorely lacking in Scriptural references that describe what it is like or even exactly when it is conferred.

The six weeks of Lent were almost completed but the project upon which I had embarked was finished. I felt a tremendous sense of relief and felt that it was a job well done. “Shaping our true desire to assist individuals to a new spiritual understanding requires an imaginative way of knowing and a willingness to search for deep inner meaning. This is both a journey in solitude and a journey in community.”<sup>90</sup> I had prepared in solitude and presented in community and whether or not the participating Knights have a “new spiritual understanding” is the subject matter of the next chapter.

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<sup>90</sup> Mike Bathum, 107.

## Chapter IV

### A PROJECT: EVALUATION AND IMPACT

Theological reflection deepens our experience of the world and of our own assumptions and so stops us from making unwarranted assumptions which may be false. It also has the effect of ensuring that faith and religious ideas do not become encapsulated and cut off from our experience of everyday life. A constant criticism of religious people and institutions in secular society has been that faith is kept separate from the rest of life. Theological reflection ensures that faith remains relevant to experience and is not just kept in a separate box which is only opened on Sundays in the setting of a church community.<sup>1</sup>

As a preacher, teacher and speaker, one of my principal desires is for people to think. I am always pleased to present a Scripture passage or concept in a way that my listener may have never before heard it. And whether my listener agrees or disagrees with me is less important than whether or not I empower the person to reflect on or question either my approach or his/her own convictions. The topics of my project were not new but I understood that I was presenting them in a manner unlike anything the Knights of Columbus had previously heard or even thought about. They had to listen and then decide what impact my presentations would have on their individual as well as collective lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Pattison, "Some Straws for Bricks," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 138 – 139.

The first Faith Friday (Scripture Night) was very enjoyable for me. I love to teach and the men were fertile ground into which I could plant some seeds of knowledge. They were both enthusiastic and naïve in their reception and understanding of the material.

The one-page evaluation form was kept simple (see Appendix L). Asked if they read the Bible, three responded “frequently,” eleven said “sometimes,” eight said “rarely” and two said “never.” The observation about Catholics not knowing their Bible seemed to be borne out as accurate with this first response. Their answers struck me as typical. On the one hand they enjoyed hearing about The Book but on the other hand had not bothered to read The Book itself. Why read the entire manual when the highlights can be pointed out? It is less work and more entertaining.

An answer that intrigued me both as a preacher and student of Scripture was to the second question: did the members ever make connections between the Bible passages they heard at Mass with their daily lives? Perhaps this is a reflection of my preaching skills (or lack thereof) or their own introspection, but twelve participants said that they “frequently” make such connections while the other fifteen said they did so “sometimes.”

When asked about what specific areas of Scripture they would like to learn more, most expressed a curiosity about individual Books of the Bible (which more than likely they had never read) as well as the Christian Scriptural basis for sacraments in the Catholic Church. The previous Lent I had presented a Sacraments Series during Lent and the Scriptural foundations (which admittedly can be somewhat tangential) had been clearly explained. Perhaps this was a call to present the series – or at least part of it – again next year, if not to the entire parish, then to the Knights of Columbus. Sacraments

are key to Catholicism. “The common life of faith communities is based on agreement on experiences of God that are acknowledged by the community as authentic and binding.”<sup>2</sup>

Most gave no answer when asked what further questions the night’s presentation raised, but those who did respond wanted to know about “contradictions in the New Testament” (from someone who “never” reads the Bible), and if “there was a flood and an arc” (sic) (from someone who “rarely” reads the Bible). I was happy to see that I had piqued the interest of men who apparently had little exposure to Scripture outside of Mass. Others were interested in the immensity or limitations of God’s forgiveness and how the Bible stories are “continuing revelation.” (Questions about the forgiving nature of God would provide fodder for Good Friday’s presentation on Eternal Life.)

Further comments and observations included “This was way more interesting than I anticipated;” “Very well done and, most importantly, very thought provoking;” “Great Job; “Wow;” “Thank you” and “Fantastic. Time well spent. Wish it was (sic) like this at Mass every Sunday. Look forward to this again.” A ninety-minute homily every Sunday? Not in the Catholic Church! But maybe this Knight was saying something very profound: in the particular setting of the Knights’ Hall, in a gathering that was only men, was he more comfortable and more disposed to the message than when he attends Mass in the Church House where “each Sunday men sit...and are faced with a structured worship service that deals with concepts, things we are not altogether sure of or comfortable with. The themes of Sunday worship are presentations of things we cannot

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<sup>2</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, 12.

see.”<sup>3</sup> The presentation apparently resonated with the men who finally were able to see themselves on the pages of Scripture.

After the evaluations had been handed in, the men retired to the (in)famous bar. I sat with a few of the Knights at one of the tables as I listened to other members continuing the discussion leaning against the bar with drinks in their hand. Rather than discussing basketball scores or things political, they were talking about the Bible! They were debating issues. They were questioning the historicity of various Hebrew Scripture narratives. They kept turning to me and shouting out their questions, expecting me to say who was right and who was wrong. I could not have been happier. Already there was a change in the men or at least in the focus of their conversations. Imagine, Catholic men discussing Scripture!

And yet the best comments were the ones that were still to come which the men did not write down: they began telling their friends about the presentation. At the Sunday Masses several Knights told me that their brother Knights had told them that they had missed something great the previous Friday night. Men, who had not been there, were promising me that they would certainly be present for the next Faith Friday. I was feeling affirmed. Their enthusiasm was feeding my own. Before I had made the presentation, I had my misgivings, fears and doubts; next time, I would have less trepidation.

Two weeks later we gathered for the Second Faith Friday (Celibacy/Married Clergy). Even though I had gotten several promises of attendance from individual members who had absented themselves from the Scripture Presentation, and word of mouth had seemed so positive, only twenty-two evaluation forms (see Appendix M) were

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<sup>3</sup> Mike Bathum, 94.

collected at the end of the evening with more than thirty men having attended. Maybe some of the men have an aversion to writing and reflecting on paper, thus explaining why every participant did not complete an evaluation form.

My honesty in sharing my struggles with and questions about celibacy allowed the men to see me in a new light. My having poked holes in this rule of the universal Church challenged their view of the issue. “Despite the fact that the ideal and the practice of celibacy exist in many religious traditions, it is not well understood.”<sup>4</sup> Their responses on the evaluation form allowed me to see *them* in a new light as well. This forum was something that none of us had ever before experienced and I think it humanized me for them in yet another way.

Nineteen of the men responded that the presentation helped them to understand better clerical celibacy in the Catholic Church while three indicated that it helped them “somewhat.” No one said it was not a beneficial presentation. To my surprise, twelve stated that celibacy was not necessary with only five saying that it was. Others were not able to say one way or the other, but added although not *necessary*, “it helps make the church what it is.” And, say I, maybe it helps it to be what it is *not*. And since I had stated that Catholics barely support the single priest with a credible living wage, let alone a married one with a family, one response added, “finances are a good reason to maintain the policy!” Easy for him to say!

Although the responses seemed to indicate that the men were not sure of this discipline, thirteen went on to say that clerical celibacy was nonetheless a “value” in the Catholic Church, with eight saying that “perhaps” it was a value and only one man saying

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<sup>4</sup> A. W. Richard Sipe, 545.

that it is not. Their answers mirror my own uncertain opinion as I could argue both for and against clerical celibacy, even though the Church says “ordained ministers in the Latin Church... give themselves entirely to God and to men. Celibacy is a sign of this new life to the service of which the Church’s minister is consecrated; accepted with a joyous heart celibacy radiantly proclaims the Reign of God.”<sup>5</sup>

The next question gave four suggested answers and the respondents were able to choose as many of them as they wanted. Who, did they think, should qualify for ordination in the Catholic Church? Fifteen said that only celibate men should be admitted to the priesthood while another fifteen said that married men could be ordained. Six would open the priesthood to celibate women and another six would ordain married women. Their confusion on this “given” was evident but at least they had started to think about it – probably for the first time, despite the Catholic Church affirming that “only a baptized man (*vir*) validly received sacred ordination” and “a man who has already received the sacrament of Holy Orders can no longer marry.”<sup>6</sup>

Further observations and comments said that the presentation was “well done” and “very interesting” and included calls “for further debate” and for “the church to be open minded.” I was surprised that these men were as open-minded as they seemed to be. Traditions die-hard and I had always seen the older members as typical, non-thinking traditionalist Catholics. But if I observe that the Knights of Columbus is a microcosm of the Church itself, a Church whose membership is questioning and challenging many of its age-old rules and teachings, why should I be surprised by their comments? Maybe I have been the close-minded one. “The most important thing about the declaration is not that

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<sup>5</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Boston: Saint Paul Books and Media, 1994), 395.

<sup>6</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 394 – 395.

the Church says she cannot ordain women to be priests. It is the reason the Congregation gives: The Church cannot ordain women to be priests because Christ has given that norm, a norm which the Church must follow and is not free to change.”<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul II claimed that, even in his position as Pontiff, he was not free to relax the discipline of celibacy in the western Church. The Church-hierarchical may feel that its hands are tied but not all of the Church-faithful see it that way.

I had put a lot of work into Saint Joseph Day. In addition to ordering food and enlisting the assistance of the Lay Advisory Committee for set-up and clean up, I had two major presentations to prepare. I was really enjoying this men’s ministry and I was thinking that it was paying off. The challenge that I delivered in my sermon at Mass elicited two reactions independent of the evaluation forms the Knights were given to complete at the end of the evening. During the dinner, one of the members asked me for the name of Matthew Fox’s book, as my references to it piqued his interest and he wanted to read it. Another member, who is a building contractor, told me, with tongue in cheek, that he took umbrage with my question ‘are we men only good for grunt work?’ He said ‘of course we’re not!’ (Although he directed the (grunt) work of refurbishing the interior of the Knights’ Hall, he participates in nothing sponsored by the Knights of Columbus!)

The Saint Joseph Day Sermon was the only presentation that did not invite “audience participation.” Catholics are not accustomed to call and response during the homily at Mass, even though I encourage it. This was not the case as I presented Matrimony. Much to my delight, agreements and disagreements were promptly called out. The men were thinking! Maybe some were offended.

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<sup>7</sup> David M. Maloney, 8.



Thirty-nine Knights of Columbus filled out evaluation forms (see Appendix N) at the end of the night. The evaluation form (which was distributed for both presentations after the second address of the evening) was divided into two parts. They were asked if they were part of any Parish Ministry. Twenty-nine indicated that they were and ten said that they were not. They were then asked of what ministry they would like to be a part. Twenty-three men left the answer blank, supporting my premise that they would prefer to use their brawn but not their brains, but filling me with hope that they would at least begin to think about some sort of ministry.

The third and final question for this part of the evening's discussion tried to pin them down: "If you've never been part of any Parish Ministry – why not?" Two claimed never to have been asked, one said he lacked the time and the others simply left the answer blank. Maybe they feel ill equipped, or, as I had suggested, that virtually the only men in ministry are ordained. Yet the attitude that keeps the priest in charge of both pastoral and temporal concerns is the converse of what Father Michael McGivney had in mind, for "he accepted the completely lay character of the Board of Directors which, by the constitution, removed the priest founder from the business concerns of the Order.<sup>8</sup> I constantly say that the role of pastor in the Catholic Church is incongruous: the same person should not make administrative and pastoral decisions.

The animated discussion that followed my presentation on marriage was nothing short of jaw dropping. Little was said regarding traditional marriage, but when it came to Marriage Equality/Gay Marriage, more than one man in his seventies witnessed to his belief that God would never turn his back on any union founded in love; that if God is

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher J. Kauffman, 60.

love, God is in the love that two people of the same gender have for each other just as God is present in heterosexual unions. Having been present to regional Knights of Columbus Meetings, in that very Hall, during which County and State Officials of the Knights of Columbus have called for redoubled efforts to make certain that New Jersey never passes a sex-same marriage bill, member after member of the local Council was proclaiming his belief that everyone had the right to marry whomever he or she wishes to marry.

Whereas the Knights of Columbus' official position may echo that of the Church, believing that "(homosexual acts) are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved,"<sup>9</sup> the individual Knight of Columbus had quite a different opinion.

Again, the Knights of Columbus are microcosm of the Church whose official stance is not necessarily the stance of its members. As was the case when we discussed clerical celibacy, the men had never been previously given an opportunity to listen to a balanced presentation on the subject (which I believe I offered) and openly reflect upon it. Their oral reactions and positions were startling, yet their written responses were once again somewhat contradictory.

Every question was not answered on each evaluation form, but for those who responded, twenty-seven said they agreed with the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage (one man and one woman) whereas seven indicated that they disagreed. On the one hand many more than seven had said they believed that people had the right to love

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<sup>9</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 566.

whom they chose to love, yet their (the Knights) membership in the Church and their embrace of its teachings apparently trumped their personal stance.

The same was true when asked whether or not they agreed with the Catholic Church's teaching on divorce and remarriage. Divorce has affected every family. Every marriage deemed sacramentally valid is indissoluble, resulting in the divorced party requiring an ecclesiastical annulment in order to remarry in the Church. For some who find themselves in this situation, the process of rectifying this in the eyes of the Church is too irksome and they simply ignore the Church's policy. Whereas on a personal and individual level the men would like the protocol to be different, on their evaluation forms, nineteen agreed with the Church's policy and thirteen disagreed. One of our auxiliary Bishops once commented to me that "the only sin the Church doesn't forgive is the sin of a bad marriage." It seemed that the majority of the Knights of Columbus felt the same way, so their acceptance of Church Law surprised me.

The final statement on the evaluation requested them to state what right they felt two homosexuals had. Sixteen stated that New Jersey's Civil Union Law was sufficient; thirteen said they should be granted the right to marry civilly; six believed that the Church should celebrate their marriage sacramentally and only two felt there should be no societal approbation whatsoever. With the Church very publicly against marriage for two people of the same gender, the majority of the men stated their disagreement with the Church's stance; yet with regard to marriage between people of opposite gender, the majority stood with the Church's intolerance of divorce and remarriage outside the Church. I could see the Project helping them to think and discern and to agree or disagree

intelligently with Church teachings. My hunch was that their heads were actually spinning – and that was a very good thing.

A week and a half later, it was Good Friday. I delivered the last of the presentations towards the end of a long day. Although only eighteen of the Knights responded that they would be in attendance, twenty-four evaluations forms were returned to me at the end of the evening (see Appendix O), but that number did not reflect the number of men who were actually there. Meeting in the sacred space of the Church House and not the Knights' Hall was a far cry from previous years when an e-mail went out reminding the men that the bar would be open and they should come down and have a few drinks. Already the local chapter of the Knights of Columbus was moving beyond my well-worn evaluation of the organization as a “phony baloney Catholic drinking club.”

The animated discussion that came towards the end of the teaching was, once again, surprising. There are a few senior members who fought in World War II and others who were in the Korean or Vietnamese Wars. Not only is patriotism one of the tenets of the Knights of Columbus, it is one of the virtues of the individual Knight as well. They began to discuss who goes to heaven. The collective answer was everyone. They were proclaiming their faith in a God who forgives everyone of everything. Men, who had been claiming just a few weeks before that no one who was not baptized could enter the Kingdom, were now saying anyone could get there. There was no hell and even

if there were, God would send no one there. No necessity of discussing the Fundamental Option Theory here.<sup>10</sup>

I pressed the issue: God forgives everybody everything, no matter what? Many were quite vocal with their yeses. Surely I could trip them up. With so many veterans and patriotic flag wavers in my audience, I asked if Hitler went to heaven. Having seen the horrors of war, I thought there would be an exception to their belief in the absolute mercy of God. I was wrong. Emphatically, many declared that God forgave even Hitler and thus the Führer had made into the splendor of the Kingdom of God. The Catholic teaching of faith *and* works had no place in this discussion.

Yet the responses to the questions and statements on the evaluation fell along traditional lines. As I find myself doing in my own thought processes, the men seemed to ‘let God off the hook,’ with the individual needing to accept the consequences of his/her own actions. All twenty-four respondents stated that they believed in Heaven but only twenty believed in Hell. “The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, ‘eternal fire.’”<sup>11</sup> The men were thinking independent of Church teaching and coming to their own conclusions. I was both pleased and proud. Fifteen believed in Purgatory and, in spite of my having explained the theological bind that resulted in Thomas Aquinas creating Limbo, four still clung to that belief.

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<sup>10</sup> The Fundamental Option Theory holds that one makes a basic choice for or against God; one’s life is basically directed towards or away from God, and individual actions, whether positive or negative, do not alter the direction. This choice, made in life, is not changed after death.

<sup>11</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 270.

The men's belief in a loving God that had surfaced during the discussion of Marriage Equality at the end of the Presentation on Matrimony, and which was echoed once again this night, resulted with only one of the Knights stating that he believed God sent people to Hell. Sixteen of the men believed that people send themselves there with four believing one could arrive there by either means.

Against the backdrop of a loving, welcoming God, only one of the men believed that only baptized individuals could be admitted to Heaven with twenty-three distancing themselves from that age-old teaching of the Catholic Church. Obviously there had been some growth, thought and change of mind and heart since the topic had been broached during the Scripture Presentation six weeks previous. I was curious as to whether or not any of these topics was making it into the discussions these husbands had with their wives, children and grandchildren.

And even though there were many men who confidently proclaimed that our loving God forgave even Hitler, and even though the vast majority said that it is the individual who sends him/herself to Hell and that Baptism is not a necessity for entrance into the Kingdom of God, every one of the men said that in their personal prayer life, they pray for the dead. At the parish, Mass intentions for the deceased are set well into 2014 with the 2015 Mass Book having just been opened.

My Mom is dead over twelve years. Do I believe she went to heaven? Absolutely. Do I pray for her every day? Absolutely. I guess that every Knight and I believe in a loving, merciful God, but just in case... "From the beginning the Church has honored the

memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God.”<sup>12</sup>

The Knights had also been asked to describe what Heaven and Hell are like.

“Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.”<sup>13</sup> The men’s depictions of heaven, while less theological, were actually quite similar: “like the Sunday Family Dinners of my Youth;” a “non-physical place” of “peace, love, joy and awareness of the presence of God.” “Happiness” was also a common answer and some were honest enough to say that they did not know. “Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him.”<sup>14</sup>

Hell was described as everything from “cold and dark,” to an “inferno” to the “absence of God” and “the lack of seeing my family.” Again, they were reflecting the traditional teaching of Jesus and the “fiery furnace,”<sup>15</sup> and the Church’s teaching that “the chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.”<sup>16</sup>

The Knights who had come to this final Faith Friday were thanking me for what I had done and were asking when would be the next session and what would be the topic! They were actually looking for more! Could it be that the men, whom I had written off as

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<sup>12</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 269.

<sup>13</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 267.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 2: 9.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 13: 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 270.

marginally faithful, had whetted their whistle and actually had some sort of conversion experience?

I had to spend some time in prayer and reflection, but not until I had locked the doors of the Church House after the Masses of Easter had been celebrated and I had a chance to catch my breath and clear my mind. For the moment I was feeling both a sense of satisfaction and relief. In my estimation, at least, the project had been a success. At the Easter Vigil the following night, I would be referring to Jesus as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end, but at this moment, the project was the Omega and the Alpha: it had ended, but its implications were just beginning.



## Chapter V

### COMMENCEMENT: AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING

We need to get used to the idea that theologies can be disposable and contextual; the conclusions of any particular theological reflection do not need to be seen as relevant for all people in all places and they may, indeed, be thoroughly idiosyncratic. Anyone who wants to commend their insights to a wider audience will find themselves entering into a wider conversation which will itself modify their perceptions. This is a valuable and automatic corrective to egotism and the sort of situational fundamentalism which holds that just because something is true in one's own experience, it must be true for all people everywhere.<sup>1</sup>

While the project that I undertook was purposely geared toward a specific target group, it was always in the back of my mind that I needed to bring this experience into a larger setting. I would have loved to do this project with all the men of my parish but with 1301 registered families, the sheer numbers would have made it unwieldy, if not impossible. Yet what I learned will help me to venture into new situations where I may or may not meet with the same general success I encountered with the local council of the Knights of Columbus.

Last fall I attended a statewide meeting of the Chaplains for the Knights of Columbus. At the time I was quite certain of what I wanted to do for my project but I was still quite unsure of myself. The National Chaplain delivered the keynote address and I felt as though the Spirit of God had descended upon the room and was affirming the

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Pattison, "Some Straw for Bricks," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 143.

direction in which I was headed. He spoke of the need for both renewal and education among the men who comprised the various councils. He said that in years past, one of the items on each council's agenda was a teaching by its chaplain, and he encouraged us to reinstate this tradition at our monthly meetings. More than just the nuts and bolts of administration that comprise every other social and civic organization's meetings, the Knights of Columbus needed to be furthering both the religious education and spiritual life of its members. My project already had the potential of making an impact beyond our local council.

The responses on the questionnaires, as well as the evaluations, provided me with a rich resource. The top five topics were woven into the presentations, but there were many more subjects about which the membership indicated interest. The project would come to an end but its implications would continue. The men's curiosity would need to be sated. "Congregational researchers have turned to questions of how the meaning and values that form congregational identity can be relatively cohesive within congregations and be a cohesing force for their members and the culture at large in a way that yet appreciates the richness of diversity and pluralism."<sup>2</sup> These men need more than a mere Lenten Season's-length project to be able to witness to and even defend their faith in the increasingly secular and challenging society in which they spend their lives. Although, because of current time constraints, I will not embark upon this ongoing teaching until the fall of next year, the 'course material' is quite clear. Pursuant to their curiosity about specific books of the Bible, were I to make a fifteen presentation on each one, the series would last six years.

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<sup>2</sup> Brynolf Lyon, "Relevance of Congregational Studies," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 259.

I have spoken to the new Grand Knight and we have agreed that each month's meeting agenda will include a ten to fifteen meeting teaching. In addition to addressing individual books of the Bible, as well as specific events contained therein, especially in the Book of Genesis, clarifications of seeming contradictions in or literal interpretations of the Christian Scriptures, another expressed interest, will also be addressed. Certainly as various topics are elucidated, more questions will arise. The teaching agenda can be literally endless.

When I taught the Haitian Créole language to public servants in East Orange, I began each week's session with this question: "in what situation did you find yourself this past week when you wanted to say something in Créole, but couldn't?" The same type of question can be addressed to the Knights of Columbus: "did you find yourself in a situation this past week where you were not able to address or explain something about your faith; or the Church? Were you challenged and did not know what to say?" These questions and answers could then be published in the Council's newsletter and posted on the Knights' website (as well as the parish's) and thereby reach those who do not attend meetings (or come to Mass).

Last month, Deputy Grand Knight (and former Lay Advisory Committee Co-Chair) Cecil G. and I began our second series of "Spirituality Nights," that we had instituted last year with limited success. Cecil is eager for this year's topics to be gleaned both from the project questionnaire's responses as well as from new suggestions being made by the membership. The formality and structure of the project, i.e. personal invitations and response cards, are not part of this process. While some sessions are for members only, some of the evenings include the wives as well.

Without letting my ego get in the way of things, I cannot help but think that if these evenings were advertised as being conducted only by me, and supported by personal invitations, the attendance would be greater. Our current *modus operandi* needs to be revisited. Cecil's faith is deep and his spirituality is obvious, yet his sharing can seem surface. He and I need to collaborate more effectively to make the evenings more beneficial to those in attendance.

When this thesis is completed and accepted, I plan to present it to the National Chaplain. To this end, I have already contacted Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore (see Appendix P). In the December issue of *Columbian Magazine*, he wrote of a meeting held this past summer for State Chaplains of the Knights of Columbus. They discussed the need to educate the Knights and to address a male spirituality! I have briefly explained my project to Archbishop Lori and have offered my services to both him and every chaplain of the Knights of Columbus. As of this writing, I await his response.

The project and its findings certainly have implications that could reach far beyond the Borough of Oakland, New Jersey. My method could serve as a template for other chaplains who may find themselves in the same situation in which I was: frustrated but sincere, cynical yet determined to make a difference and be an agent of positive change and spiritual growth within the membership. Whether published and disseminated among the thousands of chaplains across the United States, or presented by me at regional meetings, the project could hearten my peers – as long as they are willing to put the work into it. “Queries that are simple and humble yield thoughtful replies; they also support the emergence of authentic speech and developing voice.”<sup>3</sup> My positive and time-

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, 143.

consuming experience could certainly be their less-challenging but equally profound experience by my having blazed the trail.

Yet my experience demands that it move beyond the confines of the Knights of Columbus, both national and local. How do I bring this project and its potential to the parish? “By taking congregational studies seriously... pastoral theology can better come to understand how the whole way of life of a community (its distinctive culture) expresses its care...and the ways that care expresses and fails to express the community’s understandings of the requirements of living appropriately in relation to God and neighbor.”<sup>4</sup>

One of the subsets within the wider parish community is the Religious Education Department. Its ministry focuses on catechesis for the youth from first through eighth grades. As already noted, the catechists are predominately female and the parent who both drops off and picks up the student, is almost always the mother. Being sensitive to the reality of divorce in our community, when there are meetings for parents and students or for parents alone, we require the attendance of only one parent. Again, the attendance is female dominated. Where are the fathers? Where are our *young* fathers? No more than my own father was for me, I do not see these men as role models of faith for their children. It is not just the Knights of Columbus who need faith formation and renewal of their spirituality, all men do. My next target group needs to be the men whose children are in our Catechetical Program.

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<sup>4</sup> Brynolf Lyon, 263.

Every athletic event has a referee, a ref. It is a term that everyone, especially men, knows. The ref is key to any game and its fairness. How many men, while watching a football or baseball game, wish they could be the ref? Maybe it is because “men hardly ever have a chance to make decisions that make a real difference in their own lives or in the world around them, except in a minor diversionary way. They have to play the game or they won’t be rewarded.”<sup>5</sup> As mothers still seem to play the greatest role in the rearing of children, the men defer most decisions, especially ones concerning faith, to their children’s mothers. Men will only play a larger role in the faith lives of their children when they feel more equipped to do so.

Thus my next project will be with the group I will call the REFs – the *Religious Education Fathers*. The clever acronym alone will grab their attention. With two hundred eighty families registered in the Catechetical Program, representing slightly more than twenty percent of the total parish registrations, they comprise a group larger than the Knights of Columbus Council #5846 as well as a younger demographic. The children in the Religious Education Program are the future of our Church, but their parents – and in this case – their fathers, are the present, a very absent but potentially dynamic present.

What I learned from the project I conducted with the Knights will be my own template for this next endeavor. I will formulate another Lay Advisory Committee composed of a few of the young fathers with whom I have a relationship as their pastor. These men, who come to worship on Sunday with their families, will have better insights and more knowledge than I about their peers, and will be key in getting our initial goals and ideas down on paper.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Rohr, 27.

Right now I project that each of the Religious Education Fathers will receive a personal letter together with a questionnaire as well as a stamped self-addressed envelope to be returned to me. The fathers, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, will be asked about the level of their own religious education, their faith commitment and involvement in the religious upbringing of their children. In addition to topics of a spiritual and religious nature, there are undoubtedly many other pertinent topics of interest about which they would like to learn more, but have no forum in which to find out more about them. Again I would be providing a safe male haven where men could share with and learn from other men. Whereas I could present teachings of a religious nature, other fathers could make presentations about Christian parenting and experts could be brought in to address, among other things, the contemporary phenomenon of the world of cyberspace.

Depending on the scope of the topics, the men will be invited to various types of sessions. Commuting and family commitments will be a challenge, so some men will be available for dinner sessions during the week while others may find a Saturday morning breakfast more amenable, allowing them to return home by mid-morning to fulfill their ordinary responsibilities. Perhaps half-day symposiums could be planned with two or three workshops addressing related issues. I could conduct mini-retreats. These would encourage not just a renewal of faith and increase in spirituality, but other programs offered through this new project would ideally increase camaraderie among peers and a sense of belonging to the parish.

In October, the Vatican announced that there would be an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops from around the world convening in Rome in October 2014 as well as October 2015. Its preparatory document is entitled “Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the

Context of Evangelization.” For the first time, the Vatican is soliciting the input of the average Catholic. The Vatican has sent both the preparatory document as well as an accompanying questionnaire to every Bishop; each individual diocese is free to proceed as its local leader sees fit. Although the Archdiocese of Newark, to which I belong, has made a marginal, somewhat biased, response, I took a more pro-active stance.

Seasoned by my Knights of Columbus Project, I decided to make an objective and simplified version of this questionnaire available to everyone. My recently completed project has honed my skills to be able to facilitate this parish-wide project, and my having listened to the needs of the Knights of Columbus emboldens me to encourage the parishioners to state their opinions, concerns and hopes for the Church and its future. “By inviting folks from the sidelines to talk with you, you are already beginning to challenge their undervalued status.”<sup>6</sup>

When I began this Doctor of Ministry Program, I did not know that it would culminate with a project. In the statement that I wrote as part of my application for this degree, having just completed two consecutive degrees (MA - Seton Hall University and STM - Drew University), I wrote:

As a pastor assigned alone I have limited time and wish that over the years I had been more successful in empowering more people than I actually have. The Catholic model is all-too-often entrenched in the pastor-as-leader model. I want people to be better stewards despite their all-too-many responsibilities. Oakland and our parish are getting younger, but the younger generation is simply not as faithful as the older, departing generation. Our Religious Education Program is the largest it has been in a decade, but that is not reflected in the number of Sunday worshippers. I feel there are things I could be doing to address this issue but I find myself at a loss. I want the young Catholic families of Oakland to be more than mere cultural Catholics and I am convinced in order for that to happen, I need to study more than Scripture.

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, 152.



What I wrote almost two and a half years ago still holds true, but the man who wrote it has grown. My two degrees in Scripture continue to make an impact on my preaching and teaching skills; and although my homilies are consistently well received, I do not 'pack 'em in' like Bishop Sheen or Joel Osteen. I needed to learn and develop pastoral skills that were not necessary during my years in the inner city. The course work, peer group sharing and local pastoral need all came together creating a project that was narrow in its focus and attainable in its goals; but what I learned from the entire process is now on the brink of allowing me to make the pastoral inroads that I have long desired to make.

One project has indeed been completed, but it has caused several others to be conceived. Drew University has challenged me and now I must continue to challenge myself.

**Appendix A**  
**Knights of Columbus Questionnaire**  
 (please complete and return by January 15, 2013)

- 1.) I am a Knight of Columbus for \_\_\_\_\_ years.
- 2.) I consider myself to be a *(choose the most appropriate)*  
 very active      somewhat active      rarely active      lapsed  
**member of this council of the Knights of Columbus.**
- 3.) I consider myself to be a *(choose the most appropriate)*  
 very active      somewhat active      rarely active      lapsed  
**member of the Catholic Church.**
- 4.) I think that the Knights of Columbus is *primarily* a *(choose one)*  
 fraternal    patriotic    charitable    religious      **organization.**
- 5.) I think that the Knights of Columbus *should* primarily be a *(choose one)*  
 fraternal    patriotic    charitable    religious      **organization.**
- 6.) When you became a Knight, what were your expectations of the organization?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- 7.) Have those expectations been met?  
 Yes                      No                      Somewhat
- 8.) What teachings of the Catholic Church would you like to learn more about?  
 Birth Control      Abortion      Euthanasia/Right to Die  
 Capital Punishment      Traditional Marriage      Same-Sex Marriage  
 Divorce      Celibacy/Married Clergy      Ordination of Women  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**9.) As a Catholic man I would like to know more about:**

Scripture    Prayer    Jesus Christ    The Holy Spirit    God the Father

Saints    The Sacrament of the Eucharist    Confession    Mass

Eternal Life: e.g. Heaven Hell Purgatory Limbo

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**10.) I plan to participate in at least one of the activities of the Knights of Columbus Lenten Series.**

Yes                      No                      Not sure

**Signature** (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B**  
**The Project Is Announced**

**Rev. Thomas Paul Lipnicki**  
Chaplain, Knights of Columbus  
Ramapo Valley Council #5846  
25 Purdue Avenue  
Oakland, New Jersey 07436  
[201-337-7596/left.handed829@gmail.com](mailto:201-337-7596/left.handed829@gmail.com)

January 3, 2013

My dear Brother Knight:

May all the blessings of the Christmas Season continue to be yours as we begin another New Year of living in the grace of God. It is my hope that this Year of Our Lord 2013 will be one of spiritual renewal for our Ramapo Valley Council 5846 of the Knights of Columbus.

Although I rarely make any mention of it, I value my continuing education. As part of the degree program in which I am currently enrolled, I plan to embark upon a *Lenten Series for the Knights of Columbus* designed by us and for us. We Knights of Columbus, especially in our local council, have a proud and enviable heritage of charity and fraternity. As your chaplain, I want to heighten our awareness of the presence of Jesus Christ both in our organization and our personal and family lives.

Together with my Advisory Committee (Grand Knight **Kevin B.**, Chancellor **Cecil G.**, Past Grand Knight **Romeo J.**, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Youth Minister and Brother Knight **Brian S.**, Past Grand Knight **Kevin S.** and Lady Knight **Pat S.**, whose late husband **Ted** was also a Grand Knight), I have devised four Knights-only Lenten activities that will celebrate our Catholic faith and hopefully increase not only our Christian knowledge, but also our spirituality in our daily lives.

Please reserve the evenings of the following dates in your calendar: **Friday, February 15, Friday March 1, Tuesday March 19 and Friday March 29.**

**Fridays February 15 and March 1** at 7:30 p.m. will be *Faith Fridays* held at our Council Hall. These will be evenings of prayer, song, Scripture and sharing with a spiritual presentation.

**Tuesday March 19** will be a celebration of the Patron of Men: Saint Joseph. Beginning with a 6:00 o'clock Mass (and homily) at Our Lady of the Perpetual Help, *the Saint Joseph Men's Dinner* will follow at our Council Hall at 7:00 p.m. with a featured speaker.

Our Lenten Series will conclude with a **Good Friday Service** (March 29) to be held at 7:30 p.m. at Our Lady of Perpetual Help. It will be different from the traditional Good Friday Services that will have been celebrated that afternoon.

Please plan to be part of our **Knights Lenten Series**, if not all four evenings, at least one or some of them. The topics and content of these events will be guided by your input, gleaned from the information you will provide us on the enclosed questionnaire. At the conclusion of each gathering, you will be asked to evaluate what you experienced, but right now, I ask you please, take the time to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to me in the stamped, self-addressed envelope.

You will receive a personal invitation (and response card) to each of the four events. I look forward to our mutual growth in the Spirit of God, so that together we will become the Catholic men - husbands/fathers/sons/brothers/uncles - we are called to be in this challenging and increasingly secular world.

I have also enclosed a holy card with a prayer for the canonization of our Founder, Venerable Michael McGivney. Please add it to your daily prayer life.

Sincerely,

Rev. Thomas Paul Lipnicki

**Appendix C**  
**Invitation to the First Faith Friday: Scripture Night**

**Rev. Thomas Paul Lipnicki**  
 Chaplain, Knights of Columbus  
 Ramapo Valley Council #5846  
 25 Purdue Avenue  
 Oakland, New Jersey 07436  
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January 29, 2013

My dear Brother Knight:

If you have taken the time to complete and mail back the survey that I sent you a few weeks ago: thank you! If you have yet to return yours, please do so as soon as you can!

This past Thursday evening, some of the Committee Members and I gathered to review the surveys that we have received and to do some tallying regarding various topics of interest.

**Scripture** came in as Number One!

So following the lead of the responding members, our first **Faith Friday** will focus on Scripture, the Inspired Word of God: the Bible.

All of *The Knights of Columbus Ramapo Valley Council #5846* are invited to participate in what I hope will be an informative, interactive and uplifting evening of reflection on the Word of God in our lives. Bring your Bible! Although there is only one Bible, there are various translations, e.g. The New American Bible, The New English Bible, The New Jerusalem Bible, The New Revised Standard Bible, The Good News Bible. The more translations the merrier!

Please come to the Knights Hall on Friday evening, February 15<sup>th</sup> at 7:30. We'll explore those Bibles, learn a little bit more about them, glean some guidance and direction from them, pray with them and be inspired by them. I'll do some talking and we'll do some sharing and reading, some praying and singing. All in all it will be an evening of deepening our faith as we begin our Lenten Season.

You will help me with the room set-up by sending back the enclosed post card so I can get an idea of the number of Knights who will be attending. But even if you don't send back your card in advance, you will still more than welcome to be part of our first **Faith Friday!**

I look forward to seeing you on the 15<sup>th</sup>!

Sincerely,

Rev. Thomas Paul Lipnicki

P.S. Remember that our second Faith Friday will be on March 1<sup>st</sup>, our Knights-only Saint Joseph's Day Dinner will be on Tuesday March 19<sup>th</sup> and we will conclude our series on Good Friday evening, March 29<sup>th</sup>. Mark your calendars now!!

**Appendix D**  
**First Faith Friday: Scripture Night**

Opening Song: *Come Holy Ghost*

Let us pray: God our Father, we ask you to send the Spirit of Your Son Jesus upon us this evening. Open up our minds, open up our hearts, fill us with the richness of Your Spirit as we contemplate your word in Scripture - your revealed word to us that has guided countless generations and continues to guide our own generation in this present age. Be with us this night. Be with us as Knights of Columbus. Be with us as men who strive to give witness to your presence and to your love in the world. Bless our brothers who are not here - those who choose not to be here, those who cannot be here and allow all of us to continue to grow in Your light and Your grace, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When I sent out the initial questionnaire and I asked what kind of things the Knights would want to know more about, I was really taken a bit aback that this came in as Number One - by one vote - but it came in as Number One. I was delighted by the choice but I was also daunted by the choice.

If we take something as general as saying we are going to do a presentation on Scripture - that is about this big (*I opened wide my arms*). Courses are given on this topic - just the topic of Scripture: Introduction to the New Testament or Introduction to the Old Testament. Books are written on this subject.

I found myself a little challenged between what I should say and what I shouldn't say. I don't want to say all kinds of things that I think you might know. I also don't want to be saying things that I will not have the proper time or enough time to explain properly. Maybe this will be a bit of a primer and maybe we can do future

sessions at meetings or at other times in our future together as Knights of Columbus. That can be based on the evaluation I will ask all of you to do at the end of this evening.

Besides hearing the Bible in Church, do you have any other exposure to it? (A few men raised their hands.) Very little. Okay. If you are going to tell me you are exposed to it, I am going to ask where, how and when? Certainly you have all watched sporting events when there is someone holding up to the camera “John 3:16,” haven’t you? That is a place you are exposed to Scripture. Did you ever look it up? “And God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to be its Savior.” So there is an exposure you get.

Sometimes you pass by Protestant Churches and they will have some Bible quotes in front of them from time to time. Ever take a course in it in school? Were you ever discouraged from reading it? I think for some of us who went to Catholic grammar school back in the 50s, we weren’t encouraged to read the Bible. There was a guy I met two gyms ago – a former Catholic of course, they are all over the place - and we got into a little bit of a discussion about religion, without my showing the hand that I was holding. He doesn’t know that I am a priest and that is my preference at the gym where I go. One of the things he said was, “Catholics don’t read the Bible.” I said, “of course we do.” He said, “no, when I was a Catholic I didn’t read the Bible.” I said “maybe that was your choice that you didn’t read the Bible when you were a Catholic.”

You should read the Bible. But we can also talk about the Bible and say it can be difficult to understand. I can’t read a book on quantum physics; I have no idea what it is about. Back when I was in college, one of my friends was a poet. He was a poet to the extent that when he was a junior in college, he was taking a poetry class at Seton Hall and



the required text was a poetry anthology in which he was already published as a poet. As one of our mutual friends used to say, “I understand the words that Doug uses in his poems, I just don’t understand how he puts them together the way that he puts them together.”

I look at Scripture that way. We can pick up a book of Scripture; we can look up the Book of Proverbs, for instance, and we can read proverb after proverb after proverb and we can understand what it means. Then maybe we pick up the Song of Songs - or the Song of Solomon - and we are going to find it a little bit more difficult, a little more confusing. It is not going to be so self-evident. So sometimes we need a little bit of help if we are going to approach Scripture and read it and attempt to understand all of it all of the time.

Commentaries abound. You can go to bookstores and find all kinds of commentaries about Scripture and all of them have a particular bias. Every commentary comes from the particular idea, the particular bias of the people who are writing it. Is it always 100 percent objective? I don’t think it ever is. There is always a certain amount of subjectivity in commentaries.

So, as I do from the pulpit, if you ever listen to me, a few questions: What is the Bible? How do you define it? How do you understand it?

*“It’s God’s Word.”*

It is supposed to be the Word of God. That is what we proclaim it to be, yes.

*“It’s the basis of the Catholic faith.”*

To a certain extent, beginning with Acts of the Apostles you could say there is a certain amount of history of the Catholic faith in there. You might say that.

*“It’s the history of Israel.”*

The Old Testament is a history of Israel - and other things. So if we say it is the Word of the Lord, it makes it divine, doesn’t it? If we say that Scripture is something divine, it’s kind of awesome isn’t it? It can also sound very unapproachable in the same breath. Who wrote it? Probably all men. Ruth? There are three books in the Old Testament that have female names but I don’t think we would say that any females sat down to write it.

Do you know how the Book of Mormon is supposed to have come into existence? Joseph Smith, in upstate New York, found these golden tablets written in some strange language and he sat down and he translated all of them, because he alone had the key to this language. And when he was done translating it, all those golden tablets suddenly disappeared and went back up into Heaven. That is the very nice and pious way that the Church of Latter Day Saints, the Mormons, say that their Third Testament came into being. We don’t believe that the Bible came to us in that kind of a fashion. We don’t believe that at all. It was written by various authors, some of whom we know and some of whom we don’t know. It was written over the course of hundreds of years.

The first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy - have long been called the Books of Moses, the Book of the Law. That is very easy, very convenient. Jesus refers to Moses on various occasions: “go offer the gift that Moses prescribed” (Matthew 8: 4), “teacher, Moses wrote” (Mark 12: 19) - and that is a nice easy tradition that existed for hundreds of years - that Moses wrote the first five

books of the Bible. One of the difficulties is that Moses dies before those five books are over. And so, to say that he wrote about his own death is a little bit of a stretch in our imagination. But let's look at that a little bit.

Those of you who have Bibles with you that include the Old Testament I would like you to open to the Book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. You know that the books of the Bible are divided up for our convenience, to be able to read and study and open to chapters and verses, correct? I want you to open up to the sixth chapter of the Book of Genesis, verses 17 through 22. (One of the men reads the text aloud.)

So what do we have here? How many animals are going in? A pair of each, a male and a female of each one. Okay good. Go to chapter 7 and somebody read verses 1 through 5 of chapter 7. (Another man reads the text aloud.)

So, how many pairs of animals? Which one? Is it a pair, as in chapter 6 or is it 7 pairs as in chapter 7? What I want to get across to you, by showing you this seeming contradiction, is that this is just one example of seeming contradictions in Scripture. So was there one author of the five books? Obviously not. So we need to understand - and we are not going to get into any details about this - is that scholars have long espoused the theory that there were four different major traditions that came together to form those first five books of the Bible. Not one author, not two but a whole variety of traditions that were coming together.

Scholars take care of all this kind of stuff for us, but what is our purpose as men of faith as we listen to this? We can understand that God has power over life and death; that God wants us to live righteous lives because we have a whole new creation

happening here. Everybody is being wiped out and it is just going to be Noah's family and this new creation. We look more to the message than to the details.

I am going to say this a couple of times tonight: that we are not going to sweat the details. John! (I called on one of members.) Did you ever tell stories at family gatherings? Do you have brothers and sisters? When you tell a story about growing up, do your brother or your sister ever correct you on some of the details? (He said they did.)

We tell family stories, and do we tell them from a different vantage point? And don't other people who are related to us see the story a little bit differently or remember it a little bit differently? (The men agree.)

That is what I want to say about traditions. At various parts of this great land that we are going to call Israel for our purposes here - even though it wasn't called that in those days - there were different traditions in different areas. Remember you are dealing with a people who didn't write, who didn't read and write. If you go into any culture even today that doesn't read and write, the spoken word is what really gets remembered. And the spoken word, of course, gets edited and changed and that is what I mean by different traditions that are coming from different parts of the nation. They are still telling the same story. There were those that told the Noah story in terms of seven pairs of the clean and one pair of the unclean and there was another tradition that told the story of Noah with only one pair of animals, two by two going into the ark. That is what I mean by traditions. We have at least four of these traditions coming together in the first five books of the Bible.

If we are going to go back to what I said before about family traditions and telling family stories - Randy: (I call on another member whose family I know very well.)

maybe the way you tell the story is different from the way Heather (his sister) tells the story, it might be different from the way Rosemary (his mother) tells the story, no doubt. But when you get together and you write the family history book, whose version of the story is going to go in - yours, Heather's or Rosemary's? or maybe two of the three, or maybe all three. And so we can apply that to the way we look at repetitions that are different in the Book of Genesis.

Back to the question - who wrote the Bible? Many authors - and one of the things that we say about these authors is that they wrote under the Grace of Inspiration. Not automatic writing, that they sat down and had no idea what they were doing and they just picked up a quill and put it against their scroll and began to scribble all kinds of things down. God, we believe, inspired every individual writer; and that individual writer wrote with his personal style and he wrote with his own personal vocabulary and even from his own personal vantage point.

You can read through the first two Books of Kings and you can read through the first two Books of Chronicles and you are going to see different depictions of David. You are going to find some that say David was really great and you are going to find some that criticize David: a particular vantage point. In the Genesis Group I say, and I have said this earlier tonight already, we are not going to sweat the details. What's the *point* of the narrative that we want to read? So far I have really been speaking in terms of Old Testament - bear with me. We can't have the New Testament without the Old Testament. Maybe we could but we don't and we can't imagine it that way.

Why was all of this written? The Bible, the Old Testament, the New Testament but especially the Old Testament was written as a book of faith, of God's desire to

communicate with people - not just one recipient of revelation but to communicate with everybody - obviously to communicate with more than just the Jewish people.

The Old Testament - I asked you different ideas of what it was - yes, it is the history of the Jewish people, no question about it, who are constantly called what?

*“The Chosen People.”*

But what does that mean? That there were those who were chosen and those who were not chosen? That they were set apart? That they were better than others? That is not what it means at all. As the Chosen People of God, they had a very distinct responsibility - to give witness to God's love in the world. And they weren't very successful at it at all times. We see this time and time again in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is not a flattering book; it shows Israel's imperfections, their constant sinning, their falling out of favor. It is where we get these images of an angry God, images of a punishing God, images of a vengeful God, images that are quite different from the images that we get from Jesus speaking in the Gospels. Jesus speaks about God as being loving, and being merciful and being forgiving. We find different depictions of God between Old Testament and New Testament.

Every nationality, I think, thinks it corners the market on guilt. Irish guilt - is there any such thing as Irish guilt? I am riddled with Polish guilt - no question about that. I guess - if we are going to speak a little pejoratively - Jewish people really corner the market on guilt, don't they?

Israel found itself constantly being conquered. You hear me referring time and time again from the pulpit of the Jewish people being taken away into exile. And they always looked upon it in these terms: 'it is our fault. We didn't do what was right and

God is punishing us. We haven't obeyed, we have forgotten the way of the Lord. God is punishing us.' And so what do we have? We have people who are riddled with guilt because they were doing the wrong thing all the time.

Let's look at Exodus. Go to the 32<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the Book of Exodus. What do we have here? The people have experienced slavery in Egypt. Moses is telling them that 'I am going to lead you, that God is going to set you free.' Pharaoh says, 'no I am not going to let you do that.' And so God sends plagues. Horrible things happen in Egypt. And so Pharaoh says, 'okay you can go.' The Jewish people are being set free; the Passover has taken place; the Red Sea has opened before them. They walk on dry land through the Red Sea. Pharaoh's soldiers try to come in and take them anyway because Pharaoh says, 'what am I doing - I am letting all this free slave labor escape, what is wrong with me? I have got to get them back.' He sends out his soldiers and his soldiers go into the dry beds of the Red Sea after the Jewish people and God causes all of the water to come back and all of their wheels get stuck in the mud and all these soldiers drown and die. The Jewish people enter the Promised Land. This is wonderful, dramatic, powerful stuff!

And then what? Moses goes up on the mountain to commune with God. And then what happens? Who will read verses 1 through 6 of chapter 32?

(One of the men reads aloud.)

So what a short memory they have. They have been taken out of slavery; they have seen all of these miracles take place. 'Moses is dallying too long up that mountain and we don't know what happened to him so we need a new god. This God who saved us from Egypt, he is not good enough.' And so they make this Golden Calf. Rather unbelievable - what is wrong with these people? Then what happens? Read verse 7 - 10.

(One of the men reads aloud.)

God looks at this and his wrath blazes up and he says, 'you know what - I am going to kill them. I am going to kill all these people. They are turning their back on me; okay fine, I am going to turn my back on them.'

One of the things we need to hear in these early books of the Old Testament is that people put a lot of emotion on God that they had themselves: they betrayed and so God is going to betray them too. Betray them right back. I don't know that Jesus would express it that way now, would he? In any event, God says he is going to kill all these people. All right, then what happens? Read me verses 11-14 somebody. (One of the men reads the verses aloud.)

So what does Moses do? Moses says, 'hey God, you can't do that. You can't destroy your people. The Egyptians are going to say, look what this God did to His people. You can't do that, you have got to change your mind and here are all the reasons you've got to change your mind.' And God does that. God changes his mind.

Isn't that how we pray? Isn't that our prayer? We can read it in the Book of Exodus from thousands of years ago and we can look to ourselves as we turn to God and say: 'God you know the future, you know what is going to happen, could you maybe change your mind and work things out a little bit better for me, okay? Can you do things a little bit differently from the way you originally intended? How about working some miracle in my life - how about working some miracle, great or small, in my life?' The Bible, Scripture, is full of stories of imperfect people whom God chose nonetheless to do great things in His name. They prayed, we pray. The more things change, the more things remain the same.



Go to the Second book of Samuel. This gets proclaimed at Mass every other year. It is one of those shocking readings. Second book of Samuel, chapter 11 verses 1 through 17. (One of the men reads aloud.)

Here we have King David, wonderful King David, writer of the psalms - at least some of them. Kind David - Jesus was born of the line of King David. And what does he do? He is walking on his roof one day and he sees this woman bathing and he says, 'wow she is really hot.' Now we know, by way of physics, if he can see her, she can see him. She knows exactly what she is doing too, doesn't she? And so she comes up to his room, and they have relations and she gets pregnant. Then what happens?

There was a grand tradition when a man was in battle or a man was going to war, he did not have sex with his wife. This is, of course, why David brings him home. He says, 'well he is home, he has been away from home, he is horny as hell and I am going to tell him - there is a guise as to why I want to ask him all these questions and I am going to send him home and, of course, the inevitable is going to happen. He is going to think that my baby is his baby.' But Uriah doesn't go down. He is not going to break the tradition. He is not going to sleep with his wife.

So now what happens? So what does David do? 'I can't get him to sleep with his wife, so I can't pass off the child as his.' So he has him killed. David writes a note and the guy himself carries the note that commands his death. All he had to do was open up the note and say, 'I wonder what he is writing to the commander.' But he didn't, he is honorable. So Joab does what the king says. And they sally forth and this guy is in the front and they pull back and they don't defend him and he gets killed. Noble isn't it? Sad, sad story. But you know what? In those days and in these days, God chooses imperfect

people to do great things in His name because that is how it is. Who else does God have to work with?

Everybody is imperfect. God only has imperfect people to work with. We can listen to stories like this and say, ‘egad, why is that preserved in Scripture? Why are we saying this is the Word of the Lord?’ Isn’t it heartening to know that God has always used imperfect people? He uses imperfect me sometimes, he uses imperfect you sometimes. Because great people are capable of doing terrible things - and they have. But we are what God has to work with and so we preserve stories like this in Scripture to remind us that we are not perfect but it does not mean we cannot do great things in God’s name.

*“So David was a bad man.”*

David was a great king, David was a great writer, David was a great musician, David did great things in the name of the Lord. He also did some terrible things too.

*“David was great but also did bad things.”*

That’s what I just said. We ask the question ‘why does this get preserved?’ It gets preserved because God has always used imperfect people to do great things in His name. whether that is George Vallone, or Kevin Sorbanelli or Tom Lipnicki.

*“David was a terrible sinner.”*

Nobody is perfect. Some people are guilty of worse things than other people, but Jesus reminds us constantly of God’s mercy, and of God’s forgiveness, and of God’s understanding. It is a tremendous challenge.

*“But he was a King and should have been a better person.”*

Time Magazine did an article about that a number of years ago - about John Kennedy: The good things that John Kennedy did as President but if everybody knew what John Kennedy had done behind closed doors, would he have been elected President? One of the points that they made in the article was that if you make really lousy judgments in your personal life can you make really good judgments elsewhere? That is the difficulty. The difficulty was then and the difficulty is now.

*“When was this written?”*

When was this written? That is difficult to say, the oldest book is probably the Book of Job and the earliest books probably started getting written down by about 1400 B.C. Revelation is the youngest book in Scripture, which is the last book of the New Testament and that probably dates from about 100 A.D.

What is B.C. what is A.D.? B.C.: Before Christ: A.D. Anno Domini, the year of the Lord. You are decreasingly seeing that. Do you ever see BCE and CE? Well, it is being sensitive to those who don't believe in Christ as Savior, that's one of the things. Time, the way we do it, we basically say that Jesus wasn't born in the year 0, we figure he was born about 4 B.C., that is how we do the years in the world, that is how it started in light of Christ. That has become politically incorrect. Now what they use is *C.E.* meaning *Current* or *Common Era*, and that Common Era began in the Year One, and *Before the Current Era: B.C.E.* So if you want to be really politically correct...that is what you see and use: B.C.E. and C.E.

How do we look at the Bible? We can look at the Bible in a whole variety of ways. We can look at it historically, as we said before. We can see it as history, there are historical events - there are also historical inaccuracies, no question about that. There are

scientific inaccuracies. In the Book of Joshua we can find that Joshua stops the sun in the sky. Well since we revolve around the sun that's pretty hard to do. So there are inaccuracies and once again, we are not going to sweat the details. We can look at it as a literary work. There certainly is a lot of literature in it. It is prose. It is poetry.

Do we take everything literally in the bible? Some do, but I doubt that even those who say they take it literally, take Jesus literally when He says, 'if your eye is your temptation, gouge it out, and if your hand is your temptation, cut it off.' I doubt anyone who says, 'well I believe everything literally in the Bible because I am a Fundamentalist or I fundamentally believe in everything that it says in the Bible.' No they don't. Nobody's going around gouging out his eyes. If you met somebody who chopped off his hand because his hand was his temptation would you call the doctor? Would you call a psychiatrist? Would you say this is normal? Well Jesus said to do that - but, we can't take all this literally.

Spiritually - of course we think the Bible is a spiritual book. It's a spiritual work; it brings us closer to God. It also gives us an opportunity to see the authors' developing images of God from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New Testament.

Are you allowed to think about the truth of the Bible - or are you told what you have to think? You are allowed to think. If you are in the Genesis Group, I say this about fourteen times every month when we meet: Think. You are allowed to think. I was really shaken when a Prof I had a number of years ago. We were discussing some stuff in the Bible. He said to me, "Tom nobody believes everything in the Bible." He is an ordained Presbyterian Minister. He is talking to an ordained Catholic priest. I said, "What? What

do you mean by that?” He says, “Tom, nobody believes everything in the Bible - including you, including me.” That really shook me, right down to my socks. “Well, I guess you are right,” I said.

*“Don’t we interpret the Bible?”*

Sure. Do we interpret Scripture. Of course we do, for better or for worse we interpret. No question about it, everybody does.

Open up your New Testament to the Gospel of John chapter 3 verses 17 through 19. (One of the men reads the passage.)

Do you believe in condemnation or no - or do you condemn yourself? Go to John 3 verse 1 to 5. And yes, we are going to cover that very famous statement. (One of the men reads the passage.)

Do you believe that? There are those Bible thumpers today going around who say well you have to be baptized in order to get to the Kingdom...I know that, we used to buy pagan babies and all that stuff when we were in grammar school. There are those who say, if you are not baptized - if you are not born again - have you ever been challenged by a Bible thumper who says: ‘you are Catholic, you are not born again? You have got to be born again.’ You are born again. You were born again in your Baptism. And every day when you wake up and you endorse that baptism and choose to live that baptism, you are born again. So for anybody to say to you, ‘you are a Catholic and you are not born again,’ that is not accurate. You are born again. Absolutely you are.

*“But we were taught that if you weren’t baptized, that you were born with original sin...”*

Correct.

*“And if you weren’t baptized you didn’t get rid of original sin and you could never go to heaven.”*

Well a lot of holy people didn’t make it to Heaven then, didn’t they? Am I denying the efficacy of baptism? No, I’m not. I also recognize that people who haven’t been baptized still get to the Kingdom. Vatican II made a point of speaking about the anonymous Christian - the person who did right things even without knowing Christ and salvation coming because of the goodness of the person, who without knowing Christ, was still doing good.

*“Are we mixing views of heaven here?”*

We can mix a lot of things, can’t we.

*“You’re shaking me here. As a Catholic, and my belief is that I try to live life the best that I can, the best way that I can so that I can enter God’s Kingdom.”*

Would it have been wrong of you not to baptize Danielle and Michael?

*“For me, yes.”*

Yes it would have been, because you know the efficacy of Baptism.

*“Right.”*

If you didn’t know about Baptism, that is a different story. If there is no availability of Baptism, that is a different story. But you understand this and you accept this and you embrace this and you passed this on to the next generation.

*“Right.”*

So yeah. and if I’m shaking you a little bit, that’s a good thing too.

*“No, Tom, I’m not saying that in a bad way. If I weren’t a Catholic and for some reason my parents didn’t have me baptized and when I got older I chose to go the same way and not really choose Christ, so in that vein I’m not thinking of heaven the way Catholics think of heaven. To us heaven is being with Christ.”*

It is a distinctly Christian notion. I don’t know what a Buddhist looks forward to. I guess it is getting endlessly born again, I am not 100 percent sure to tell you the truth.

What versions of the Bibles do you have, you guys who brought Bibles with you - tell me what your Bible says on the cover.

*“New American Bible.”*

That is the Bible you hear in Church every Sunday - NAB. That is translated from the original Hebrew and Greek and sometimes Aramaic into American English. What other Bibles do we have here?

*“New English Bible.”*

The New English Bible is written in the Queen’s or the King’s English, that is that translation. (To one of the men who came without a Bible:) I gave you the Jewish Study Bible - that is just the Old Testament, 39 books of the Jewish Bible, my Jewish study edition when I decide that I need to look up a word and see how a word was used in one book and how it was in another. (To another member:) I gave you my Message - that is a paraphrased Bible. That is not a direct translation. That is a paraphrased Bible in contemporary American English. It’s fun. It’s nice. It’s nice. It’s nice. I sometimes read that version when my New American Bible, or my Jewish Study Bible, is driving me nuts, I sometimes read that translation. You have the Douay-Rheims? Ancient, wonderful translation. Dyed in the wool Catholic version. Good News Bible? Nobody be offended

by what I am going to say: the Good News Bible was written for people who read English as a second language. It is in simple English, but because it was written in such easy, good English, it became by far the best selling Bible in the United States.

*“Do you have the Bible in other languages?”*

I have it in Haitian Creole. Bon Nouvel pou Tout Moun. Maybe sometimes you see the New Jerusalem Bible - very scholarly. It was translated first into French and from French into other languages - very scholarly. I own it in French.

Is there such a thing as a Catholic Bible and a Protestant Bible? What is the difference?

*“Henry VIII did something because of his life style.”*

No, no, we're going to get a little more scholarly than that. We are going to say Martin Luther. He was the beginning of the Reformation and of course Henry was on his coattails. So is there such a thing as a Catholic Bible and a Protestant Bible – yes, but also decreasingly so. Once again this is going to focus more on the Old Testament than on the New Testament because in every Christian's Bible, the New Testament is exactly the same, the same 27 books in exactly the same order.

Let's go to the Old Testament, and if we want to be politically correct today we don't say Old Testament and New Testament but Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures. Old intimates that it wasn't good - you can still say old and new but depending upon your circles sometimes you need to say Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures. Okay, so the original languages of the Old Testament were Hebrew and Greek and, as I said, sometimes a little Aramaic. Most of them were in Hebrew. Seven books were in Greek. The book of Wisdom is in Greek. The book of Maccabees is in Greek.



The book of Sirach is in Greek. Parts of Esther are in Greek, a few others. So a total of seven Greek books and 38 Hebrew books.

The Canon of the Bible was more or less set by about the third or the fourth century. All right, so some biblical books got accepted, some didn't get accepted. HBO and others have done all kinds of specials on the suppressed books of the Bible. Here is one version, The Lost Books of the Bible, the lost Bible, forgotten Scriptures revealed - because there is this great conspiracy that we are not supposed to...all right, don't get me carried away.

How did Saint Peter die?

*"He was hung upside down."*

How do you know that?

*"It's in the Bible."*

It is not in the Bible. That comes from the Acts of Peter, a book that was not accepted in the Canon of the New Testament. In the Acts of Peter, it gives details of the fact that Peter was crucified upside down. And in the Acts of Andrew - how did Andrew die? Anyone know this one? He was crucified on a cross in the shape of an X - once again, from the Acts of Andrew.

There were books that weren't accepted into the Canon but for hundreds of years Christians had 45 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. When Martin Luther began the Reformation, he rejected the seven Greek books as not being genuine because they were written in Greek and not in Hebrew. Now the entire New Testament is written in Greek - I guess that wasn't an issue for him. So he dropped the

seven Greek books and the Protestant Canon officially became 38 books with the Catholic Canon being 45 books and that is what is the difference.

Arthur, on the New English Bible what does it say on the cover? With the apocrypha or deuterocanonicals? All the Protestant Bibles today include those seven Greek books. They put them at the end of the Canon of the Old Testament because they say, well they are not divinely inspired, not really the Word of God but they are holy and they are good and they are important so we are going to include them. That is why I say, is there a Catholic and a Protestant Bible – well, decreasingly so.

Let's spend a little bit of time on the New Testament. We have four Gospels, we have Acts of the Apostles, we have 12 Letters from Saint Paul, we have the Letter to the Hebrews which, for generations was attributed to Saint Paul and that was taken away a couple of dozen years ago. We don't know who is the author of Hebrews but we have kept it in the Canon of course. Then we have the Catholic letters of James, Peter and Peter, One, Two, Three John, Jude and Revelation. Matthew, Mark and Luke - we hear them all the time on Sunday. Ed (one of the members) says he enjoys reading the Gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke - these guys are called the Synoptic Gospels because you can take a lot of what takes place in the Gospels and make a synopsis of them - of the repetition from one Gospel to another. But even though they are repetitions, it's not exactly the same. Once again, we go back to that *tradition* word.

So I want you to open up to Matthew - the first Gospel, the first book of the New Testament - Chapter 20 verses 20 to 23. And as soon as someone gets there, read it out loud and clear.

*“Why did you leave out John?”*

I’ll get to that later. (One of the men reads the passage.)

Let’s stop there. Go to Mark Chapter 10 Verse 35 through 38. Who has it. Keep in mind what you just heard and now read this. (One of the men reads the passage.)

Okay, what is the difference between these two readings? In Matthew’s version, momma asks for the sons. In Mark’s version the sons ask for themselves. Which one is correct?

*“They’re probably both correct.”*

Once again, different traditions get handed down and what is the point we want to understand? Jesus goes into the teaching about the greatest among you must serve the rest. And it is not where you are sitting in the Kingdom, it is what you do in the here and now that is going to bring you to the Kingdom. Once again we are not going to sweat the details. We can look at the famous story of the rich young man or just the plain man or the man of the ruling class walking up to Jesus and saying ‘what must I do to inherit everlasting life?’ All three of those Synoptic Gospels have that story.

Well, Matthew, Mark, and Luke - could we have put all these Gospels together and edit them into one? Well, no, because each one of them has their point. Matthew was written for Jewish converts. Mark was written for gentile converts. Luke was almost written as a defense of Christianity in light of the growing persecution that was already going on. Understand that not one of the Gospels was written during the lifetime of Jesus - they were written later. There was nobody going around taking notes and writing all of this stuff down. Mark was probably a disciple of Peter, Luke was influenced by Saint Paul and was one of his disciples, and maybe Matthew, who wrote the Gospel, is the tax

collector that gets called from his tax collector's post - maybe not - we don't know. They have their similarities; they have their uniqueness.

Matthew. Matthew is where we have the stories about Joseph wanting to divorce Mary quietly. In Matthew we have the story of the Magi and Herod killing all the baby boys. That is only in Matthew's Gospel. Mark's Gospel doesn't give us any infancy narratives. Of course, a lot of the beautiful infancy narratives we have are from Luke: the annunciation, the visitation, the finding of Jesus in the temple. Luke is the only one who has the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Luke is the only one who has the story of the Prodigal Son. Luke is the only one who tells us the story of the Good Samaritan. All the Gospels, with their similarities, have their uniqueness and we need all of them.

And John stands alone. John is the last of the four Gospels. It is the most theological of the Gospels. The Synoptics - Matthew, Mark and Luke - they show a growing understanding of who Jesus is. John's Gospel jumps right in with the prologue and talks about Jesus' divinity - right from the very beginning. It is a newer Gospel. So much more has been understood about Jesus and the way Jesus was going to be presented to the people. John also has his unique stories: he is the one who tells us about the marriage feast at Cana, the raising of Lazarus, the Samaritan woman at the well, the man born blind, the woman caught in adultery, Doubting Thomas. These narratives are only in John's Gospel. He is unique among the four Gospel writers.

Were there other Gospels that were written? Absolutely there were. There were rejected Gospels, no question about it. I like to think along the lines of what I said before, there is the grace of inspiration by which men wrote the Gospels and wrote the Old Testament, wrote Hebrew Scripture. I like to think there is a grace of selection for the

Church Fathers who were making a decision as to what Books were going to get accepted and what Books were going to get rejected.

*“When was John written?”*

John, probably about 90 A.D. I am going to read you something from the Gospel of Thomas. One of the jokes that I have long said to people that if I ever become Pope, I am going to make the Gospel of Thomas Canonical.”

*“Well you know that’s never going to happen.*

“When the Child Jesus was five years of age and there had been a shower of rain which was now over, Jesus was playing with other Hebrew boys by a running stream and the water, running over the banks, stood in little lakes. But the water instantly became clear again, He having smote them only by His word, they readily obeyed him. Then He took from the bank of streams some soft clay and formed out of it twelve sparrows - note twelve - twelve sparrows and there were other boys playing with him. But a certain Jew seeing the things that he was doing, namely his forming clay into figures of sparrows on the Sabbath day, went presently away and told His father Joseph and said, ‘Behold, thy boy is playing by the riverside and has taken clay and formed it into twelve sparrows and profaneth the Sabbath.’ Then Joseph came to the place where He was and when he saw him, called to Him and said, ‘Why doest thou, that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath day?’ Then Jesus, clapping together the palms of His hands, called to the sparrows and said to them, ‘Go, fly away, and while ye live, remember me.’ So the sparrows fled away making a noise.” Any other questions as to why this wasn’t accepted?

“Another time Jesus went forth into the street and a boy running by, rushed upon His shoulder. At which Jesus, being angry, said to him, ‘Thou shalt go no farther.’ And he instantly fell down dead.” (Laughter)

These stories were created many years after Jesus lived and they are telling these pious, magical stories about Jesus as a little baby. I want to read something else and this addresses an issue that you probably never think about, but this is from the First Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ.

“The following accounts were found in the book of Joseph the High Priest, called by some Caiaphas. He relates that Jesus spoke even when He was in the cradle and said to His mother, ‘Mary I am Jesus, the Son of God. That Word which thou didst bring forth according to the declaration of the Angel Gabriel to thee and my Father hath sent me for the salvation of the world.’”

Any ideas as to why this wasn’t accepted? But it addresses the issue. Because was Jesus a real, live baby - or did He pretend to be a baby? We don’t think about that and so if He didn’t pretend to be a baby and was a real live baby, then there was a growing understanding on His part. We hear about the losing of him in the Temple at twelve and what he says to Joseph and Mary.

This would say, well he pretended to be a baby and this baby sat up in the crib and said, “You know Mary, I am Jesus Son of God.” There are all kinds of these things floating around and there are those who would like you to believe it has all been suppressed because there is a great conspiracy against you.

*“The Church does not accept these Gospels”?*

No, they are rejected. They still exist but the Church does not accept them as Canonical. No, not at all.

*“This story is similar to something in the Koran that the babe in the cradle sits up and says that he is the prophet.”*

We are called to believe and faith is belief in things we do not see and cannot understand but let's not push it.

I want to encourage you to read and pray with Scripture. These black meditation books we get for Lent every year. This is a good way to start. During the season of Lent, there is a Scripture passage and a bit of a meditation. That is a way you can begin to read and pray with Scripture. Something else you can do is you can choose a book from the New Testament or the Old Testament. For argument's sake, I am going to suggest the Gospel of Mark. That was the first Gospel I read from front to back my first couple of weeks in the seminary. I sat down in one sitting and I read a Gospel through and I thought, this would probably behoove me as a budding young theological student to read a Gospel. So if you want to read a Gospel I would suggest Mark. It is short; it is quick; it is to the point. Or you might want to pick up the Book of Proverbs or pick up a Psalm and read Psalm One today and Psalm Two next week. Whatever.

What I want you to do right now, I want to walk you through a short meditation which has the Latin term *Lectio Divina*, maybe you have heard the term before, maybe you have not but *Lectio Divina*. We are going to turn to Mark Chapter 4 - this could work for any passage but for our purposes today - and I want you to read Verses 35 to 41.

*Lectio Divina* would say this is Holy Divine reading and in English I am going to tell you to read, to meditate, to pray and to contemplate. Maybe we should have this read out loud. (One of the men read the passage.)

Keep looking at that in the Bible in front of you. In *Lectio Divina*, in holy reading, read that passage. Read it once, and read it a second time. Now what line stands out for you in that? We are receiving this reading; this reading is creative; this reading is generative. What stands out for you? That he stands and he rebukes the wind? What stands out for you? The fear of the disciples? What is standing out for you? The faith that the disciples are called to have? What stands out for you? Meditate on these verses. Maybe the line that is most important to you is a line you would memorize. Memorize this line.

They say that the Benedictine monks - who were the ones who began this whole notion of Holy Reading, of *Lectio Divina* - when they would walk back to their cells from the chapel they would be mumbling to themselves, and what they would be mumbling was the line that stood out most for them. And they would mumble it and mumble it and of course, they had memorized it and they would think about it. They would contemplate on it.

We hear in the beginning of Luke's Gospel all these different things that happened in the Infancy Narratives and Mary meditated on these things in her heart. She treasured them in her heart. So what are you meditating on, what are you treasuring, what about this reading can you identify with? Are there times when you feel like you are in a rocky boat, that the boat that you are in as an individual, with your marriage, with your home, with your children, your grandchildren, at work - you sometimes feel like you are



being tossed about on the waves and you are frightened? Think about this. What is God telling you in the midst of this reading? Is he speaking to you? Is God reaching out to you? Is Jesus reminding you: ‘hey don’t worry about how much you are being tossed about, I am there.’ I am there in the middle of all of this.

Pray with that: ‘Lord, I so often think I am being tossed about; Lord I am so stressed out. There are so many things in my life that aren’t the way I want them to be. I don’t know which way to turn; I don’t know which end is up; I’m turned upside down; I am tossed around. Lord, help me to know that you are with me. Help me to feel your presence in my life. Calm the storm that I am in. I have faith in You. I am like those disciples. I am afraid but I have faith and I want to believe and I want to believe more firmly.’ Contemplate that. Open yourself up to the loving merciful God you will encounter in any reading, but especially this one we are looking at. Contemplate, be quiet. Let the Spirit of God come upon you and think about what you might be able to take from this particular passage. You can do it with this passage; you can do it with countless passages in Hebrew Scripture or in Christian Scripture. You can do this kind of reading with an entire book. You can do it with the passages in this little meditation book; it divides it up really nicely.

Were any of you in Church the day that I had everybody singing the hymn that I wrote about consubstantial with the Father? I got a lovely e-mail from Bunny Mondare. She did *Lectio Divino* with the lyrics of that song. And she shared with me her *Lectio Divino* of all the different things she had been meditating on prior to hearing me do that song with the congregation and just the whole notion of Divinity and how we fit in with God and how we fit in with Jesus and how He fits into our lives and it was a very

beautiful meditation she shared with me. We can do it with so many things: it can be a song in Church, it can be a reading, it can be Scripture and as I said once again, those little black meditation books.

Let us pray: God our Father we ask you to help us in our journey of faith. That every time we feel that we are tossed about on the waves, that every time we think that our boat is going to capsize, that every time we are frightened, every time we have misgivings and every time we don't understand, to recognize that you, Jesus, are with us in our boat. We might get tossed around a little bit more but we are not going to capsize. We might be frightened, but not unto death. We might feel alone but we are not because you never abandon those you have called to be your own and we know that you have called us to be your own and we know that you love us as your brothers and we love you as our brother. Help us to feel your presence in our lives, help us to cherish you as our Savior and to cherish your Word. You are the Word made flesh that came to dwell among us in this challenging and increasingly difficult world in which we live. Continue to open our hearts and our minds to your inspired word in Scripture. Help us to continue to see you, in Hebrew Scripture, in Christian Scripture, to see you in our lives, to see you in the Church, to see you in the celebration of our Sacraments. Continue to be with us and help us know that with your love and your presence and your grace and your light in our lives, that no matter how difficult the storm, and how much we are tossed about, we can still find your calm and we can still find your peace, a peace which the world will not give, but a peace that you give to us every day of our lives.

**Appendix E**  
**Invitation to Second Faith Friday: Celibacy/Married Clergy**

**Rev. Thomas Paul Lipnicki**  
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February 19, 2013

My dear Brother Knight:

If you have taken the time to complete and mail back the survey that I sent you a few weeks ago: thank you! If you have yet to return yours, it is still not too late to do so!

This past Friday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, we had the first of what I am calling our **Faith Fridays**. About thirty Knights of Columbus (as well as one *Knight-in-Potentia* – a member's eighth grade son) gathered for a great (one member said “awesome”) evening of prayer, reflection and teaching on Scripture. It was both informative and formative. Afterwards some members stood at the bar having a drink discussing, of all things, the Bible!

Our next **Faith Friday** will take place on March 1<sup>st</sup> at 7:30 p.m. in the Knights Hall. Following the directives of the members who responded to the questionnaire of January 3<sup>rd</sup>, the topic for presentation and discussion will be Celibacy/Married Clergy. Once again it should be a lively evening dedicated to a timely topic that affects the Church of both today and tomorrow.

You will help me with the room set-up by sending back the enclosed post card so I can get an idea of the number of Knights who will be attending. But even if you don't send back your card in advance, you will still more than welcome to be part of our second **Faith Friday!**

I look forward to seeing you on the 1<sup>st</sup>!

Sincerely,

Rev. Thomas Paul Lipnicki

P.S. Remember that our Knights-only Saint Joseph's Day Mass and Dinner will be on Tuesday March 19<sup>th</sup> and we will conclude our series on Good Friday evening, March 29<sup>th</sup>. Mark your calendars now!!

**Appendix F**  
**Second Faith Friday: Celibacy and Married Clergy**

Let us pray...God our Father again we ask you to send the Spirit of your son Jesus into our midst as we reflect upon this particular topic of celibacy, married clergy, as we reflect upon the Church in our day and age: a changing Church, a challenged Church, a Church in need of healing, a Church always in need of direction and inspiration. And so we ask you to bless us as we gather together this night. Open our hearts and open our ears. Bless our reflection and bless our discussion and our questions and our answers so that we can emerge from this session with a greater understanding of what is so oftentimes confusing and even misunderstood. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(We recited Psalm 110.)

I have to tell you that when I sent out that initial questionnaire some six, seven weeks ago, I was really surprised when this came in as second most popular topic that I gave as one of the suggestions that we could be reflecting upon as we gather together four times during the season of Lent. And when I was expressing my surprise, Kevin B. said right away: 'Why does this surprise you? This is a topic that people talk about. People are interested in where the clergy is and where it is going and where the future of the Church lies.'

And so this is a topic that people are talking about and people are interested in. After all, what is the church going to do as the number of priests continues to shrink. And so on the one hand, celibacy is seen by some as the reason for a priest shortage, and there are others who see celibacy as one of the prime reasons that there has been a sexual abuse

scandal and crisis in the Church. But I want to know my audience. Before I go on with anything else, I want to know what your thoughts are about this topic. I want to know what your comments are, your observations are. I even want to know what your questions are. Your questions can be generic or they can be posed directly to me.

*I see celibacy as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, not being in the middle of a daily relationship, allows you to focus on other responsibilities. On the other side of the sword is, as shepherd, to lead me who is immersed in a intimate relationship, you haven't experienced it, you have an intellectual knowledge of it but you don't have a felt awareness of it of what it's like to be with someone twenty-four-seven.*

That is accurate. My retort to that is - because I have heard it dozens of times - is that well, I am not in a relationship therefore where can I be with you in a relationship. By that reasoning then only the paranoid schizophrenic psychiatrist can take care of the paranoid schiz.

*I just think that if you were allowed to be in a relationship, it would enrich your experience and help you to be a better priest.*

*Is there anything in the Bible that instructed the Catholic Church that Catholic priests are supposed to be celibate?*

*You don't have to experience something to know about it. But more than raising children, you're called to raise all God's children. And today, with the divorce rate, that would be a terrible distraction to the priest.*

*I think that it should be optional for the priest to get married. I could see the priest standing up and asking for more money for the Church, and someone is going to say, yeah, so your son can go to Harvard.*

*Isn't it more historical that priests can't get married?*

Thank you for your questions and observations and we are going to end once again with questions and observations after this presentation on my part.

I said before that I was surprised that this came in the second most popular topic. When we were looking at the questionnaires that came back, one guy wrote down that he was interested in all the topics listed on the questionnaire - *except* this particular one. So tonight I am going to speak theoretically, I am going to speak piously and I am going to speak realistically. We can all handle that right? We are all friends here.

So I have to go back to my time in the seminary, many moons ago. I was never part of any discussion about celibacy in my entire time at the seminary. Now that sounds a little bit strange doesn't it? We didn't sit at table, we didn't sit at meals, we didn't discuss at our reflection groups, we didn't sit around in our rooms with friends at night and say 'hey, you know we are never going to get laid.' We never discussed it. Those discussions never happened in my experience.

Well, once it did. It was a Sunday afternoon my last year in the seminary, a few months before I was going to be ordained a deacon. And on a Sunday afternoon I had laid down on my bed with the hope of taking a nap. There was a knock on the door, I said 'Come on in' and in entered then-Father Arthur Serratelli, now-Bishop of Paterson Diocese. He was a seminary faculty member and he and I had become very good friends my last year in the seminary and his first year back on the faculty. And he came into my

bedroom and he sat on top of my desk and I am lying in my bed. He had just come in from his weekend assignment which was Most Blessed Sacrament in Franklin Lakes.

And he said, 'How are you doing?' and I said, "Arthur I am so horny I can't even nap." And he looked back at me and he nodded his head and he said, "Yeah, that happens." That was the extent of my entire discussion of celibacy in my entire career as a seminarian. That was it.

Many years later when I was Director of the Haitian Catholic Center in East Orange, I had an old nun on my staff, Sister Ellen. She has since gone on to her eternal reward. She was a classy old lady and by this time the Sisters of Charity of Convent Station were long out of their habits. You could just see that she was raised with a lot of breeding. She had very nice clothes and she was always just so and her grey hair was always just so and you could just tell she came from a really good background and probably when she was a young woman she was an absolute knockout.

So she is sitting in my office one day, and I said to her, 'Ellen, you gotta tell me. Did you feel like an idiot the first time you put on that nun getup and you went outside in public?' And she looked at me and she said, "No, I was proud." And I said, 'Wait a minute, you were a young woman, you were 19 years old when you got your habit and you put all that fluted stuff around your face and that bow tie that you shoved your face in, and all those veils hanging all over you, didn't you feel like an idiot the first time you had that on?'

"No!" I said, 'You had to! You were a young woman and all the other girls your age were going around wearing stylish clothing and here you were covering yourself up with all this stuff. I don't get it.' And she stopped and she looked at me and she said,

“You know, I never thought about it. It was all part of becoming a Sister.” And when she said that to me - I was somewhere in my mid 30s, late 30s - and for the first time I understood for myself why we never had that discussion in the seminary: because it was all part of becoming a priest. It was just a reality that we had grown up with, that the priests of the parish weren’t married and so it was just a part of the routine.

When we get ordained priests and when we get ordained deacons - there is a ceremony one year and a ceremony the following year. Prior to the actual ordination ceremony, there is a private ceremony that is held with the vice-rector of the seminary and my five classmates and me. And we went over to a private chapel and this was the first step that we were doing to get ordained. And we signed our papers requesting ordination and our oath against Modernism and all of these things, and we signed our name: “thus do I solemnly vow promise and swear, while touching with my hand these holy Gospels.” And of course it was really an exciting moment. This was it. In about six weeks we were going to walk down the aisle and we were going to be ordained. As part of that ceremony that we did privately, before we did the ceremony in the Cathedral, we also requested a vow of celibacy. This is a copy of the letter that I wrote to the Archbishop of Newark for that. I am going to pass this around and I am going to ask you to look particularly at the third paragraph.

I officially asked for it. That was a Friday. And Friday night I went to bed and I probably slept about fifteen minutes. I got up the following morning, I had to play organ for morning prayer. I was the head organist for the seminary when I was there and I went into the choir loft and I played morning prayer. Then I went downstairs looking for any classmate. I ran into my classmate Donald. He was sitting at a table in the refectory and I



said, "Did you sleep last night?" and he said, "Hell no." I said, "Why didn't you sleep?" Using a very descriptive adjective, and I won't use the adjective and he said, because I signed those... papers." I said, "Good, let's go." So the two of us went to the third classmate's room, the three of us went to the fourth, the four of us went to the fifth and finally the five of us went to the sixth classmate's room and we sat there together moaning the fact that we were 25 and 26 and 27 years old and we had signed it away for life. The excitement of the previous day was now the reality of what we never discussed; the reality that we signed away our genitals and we were not going to have sex for the rest of our lives.

The following week I went to see my doctor and I told him I haven't been sleeping and he said 'what happened in your life that you haven't been sleeping?' So I told him what happened and why I haven't been sleeping and he gave me a prescription for a sedative that I never took - never took any of the pills - but there he was trying to treat medically what I was feeling emotionally about signing these documents. Now you have heard me say this from the pulpit about a dozen times - what is the longest distance in the world according to Lipnicki? Yes. From here to here. (I pointed from the head to the heart.)

It is the longest distance in the world, from the head to the heart. And so I had to make that journey. I had to make the psychological journey from my head to my heart because the reality was: I didn't sign those papers to anything that was really changing my lifestyle. That is how I was living anyway, that was how the six of us were living anyway. But we had to at least - I had to begin to understand, that I had made a commitment and the natural rebel in me was right away balking at it, but I had to make

the distance from here to there and understand that this was what I was going to do with my life and accepting this was what I was doing in my life.

You are married guys. Did you have any qualms when you were getting married? You made a vow to be faithful to one woman forever. Did you ever have cold feet over that? We are going to be honest: have you ever had any misgivings then or since? Okay. Has the commitment you made to your one woman to your wife ever been a tough commitment? Okay.

Now there are miles of difference and distinction here, but I am committed to one less woman than you are. That is one way that I comfort myself. But there is also another way for you guys to look at it. Let's do some nuts and bolts stuff with my sacrament of Holy Orders. This comes from the old Baltimore Catechism. How many studied from the Baltimore Catechism? A venerable document, I still love it.

This is what the Baltimore Catechism has to say: "Holy Orders is the sacrament through which men receive the power and grace to perform the sacred duties of bishops, priests and other ministers of the Church."<sup>7</sup> I guess they mean deacons, huh.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says this: "Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: episcopate" - those guys with the hats - "presbyterate" - my types - "and diaconate."<sup>8</sup> - deacons.

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<sup>7</sup> Francis J. Connell, *The New Baltimore Catechism* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1941), 307.

<sup>8</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Boston: Saint Paul Books and Media, 1992), 383.

Continuing on – “What is meant by a vocation to the priesthood? By a vocation to the priesthood is meant God’s invitation to a man to become a priest; it is present when a man who possesses the necessary qualities and the desire to be a priest is called to receive Holy Orders by the bishop or other lawful superior of the Church.”<sup>9</sup>

Let’s continue. “Can the powers given to the priest at ordination ever be taken away? The powers given to the priest at ordination can never be taken away, but his ecclesiastical superiors can take away his right to use those powers lawfully.”<sup>10</sup>

Now, in any of those definitions did anyone hear the word “celibate?” In any of those definitions did you hear the word “celibacy?” No. Okay. Now none of these definitions and none of what I have said will ever dismiss the priesthood of the faithful: the priesthood that you enjoy by virtue of your Baptism, by virtue of the faithful’s call to ministry.

But we are talking about a specific sacrament here, okay? Jesus himself – getting back to some of the scriptural questions you guys have had - Jesus himself apparently made a distinction between those who believed in him as a group and those who were called to serve him in a special way. In a few weeks we are going to hear the resurrection accounts. And the resurrected Jesus didn’t appear to everyone in the same way but to add a little bit of a wrench to the works, who was the first one that the resurrected Jesus appeared to? Mary Magdalene. He appeared to a woman. Think about that for a minute.

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<sup>9</sup> Francis J. Connell, 310.

<sup>10</sup> Francis J. Connell, 310.

The Reformation, the reformed churches, some have sacraments, some have ordinances, none have seven sacraments the way we do. Luther only embraced the sacraments that he saw specifically instituted by Christ in the Gospels. Herbert Vorgrimler, who is a contemporary German theologian, talks about the institution of sacraments and of Holy Orders. He says: "Institution is not necessarily identical with a historical action."<sup>11</sup>

So although we sometimes piously say it was at the Last Supper that Christ made those twelve Apostles priests, it isn't really exactly what we read in Scripture, but that is the way we have interpreted it - and we are going to say more about Scripture. So again:

Institution is not necessarily identical with a historical action. It can also be seen as an impulse coming from the exalted Christ. It is not difficult to recognize that the Church and its offices were not instituted in a purely historical fashion, but also in a Trinitarian and salvation historical way. It is important to ask how a particular development could have begun such a short time after Jesus' departure if it could not have had some positive connection with Him.<sup>12</sup>

Back to the Catholic Catechism:

When Christ instituted the twelve, he constituted them in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter chosen from among them. Just as by the Lord's institution, Saint Peter and the rest of the apostles constituted a single apostolic college, so, in like fashion, the Roman Pontiffs, Peter's successors, and the Bishops, the successors of the apostles, are related with and united to one another.<sup>13</sup>

And because these twelve were men, the Church says that it can only ordain men.

Saint Paul wrote that there were communities that had bishops and deacons. Acts of the Apostles refers to the presbyterate which we understand as priests without any further introduction and they are always associated with a group of the episcopacy - meaning bishops. The first letter of Saint Peter talks about leadership of the Church and the

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<sup>11</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, 238.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, 238.

<sup>13</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 233.

presbyterate. Leadership in the church is also referred to in the pastoral letters of Saint Paul in the letters to Timothy and to Titus. Saint James, in his letter, refers to elders of the Church. All of this takes place less than one hundred years after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. All of this goes back to the very early days of the historical church.

Now remember the question that I asked before, “What is meant by a vocation to the priesthood? By a vocation to the priesthood is meant God’s invitation to a man to become a priest. It is present when a man possesses the necessary qualities and the desire to be a priest, is called to receive Holy Orders by the bishop or other lawful superior of the Church.”

What do you think those qualities are? I wrote down a few suggestions: faith, selflessness, dedication, love, but all of these have to be tempered by one more - this constantly willingness to be celibate. It is politely written that it is freely chosen, but let’s be honest: it is a requirement. Okay? Take me with a grain of salt if you will, but I think there are several miles between willingness and being required. But without the willingness acceding to the requirement, there is no ordination. You don’t get one without the other.

Now how did this happen? Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law. So there had to be a Mrs. Peter, right? So the first Pope was married. So when did this happen? Folks like to say, and Tony you brought this up before, folks like to say that it started because of priests’ kids inheriting church property. Celibacy long precedes the Church having amassed a lot of property. It is long before that. I am going to draw on an article that is entitled, “The History of Priestly Celibacy in the Church” and it was written by a Holy

Ghost Father a couple of years ago. I also am going to reference an author who I am going to discuss later on because he is quoted in this article by this Holy Ghost Father.

And here is this guy's definition of celibacy: "Celibacy is a freely chosen dynamic state, usually vowed, that is an honest and sustained attempt to live without direct sexual gratification in order to serve others productively for a spiritual moment."<sup>14</sup> And so in his definition, he says that there are painful stages. Okay. He says there is also a realization that taking the vow does not confer the capacity to live up to it. It is a public vow about something that is very private.

It took a number of centuries for the Church to become organized in the way we have it organized today. Centuries ago, without communications, the Church was autonomous in many regions. But there seems to be a very early trend towards celibacy in the Church. Here are some specifics: the Spanish Council of Elvira took place between 295 and 302 and it imposed celibacy in that region on priests, bishops and deacons. In 314 and 315 there were two Councils, one in Cappadocia and one in Galatia - Saint Paul wrote a letter to the Galatians, that place - and that is modern day Turkey. And both of those councils in the beginning of the fourth century forbade priests to marry.

The first true major council was the Council of Nicaea. Does that sound familiar gentlemen? We recite the creed that comes out of this council from the year 325 every Sunday when we gather together for Mass. Get ready: a proposal to impose celibacy was put forward but did not win convincing approval. But in 386, in a council held by Pope Siricius - I never heard of Pope Siricius before I read this article so I Googled Pope Siricus, and you know they give you a few headlines right away: Pope Siricius celibacy -

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<sup>14</sup> Sylvester U.N. Igboanyika, "The History of Priestly Celibacy in the Church," *African Ecclesial Review* 45 (June 2003), 89.

I said ‘that’s the guy!’ In any event, in a council that Pope Siricius held in 386, he forbade married priests from having conjugal intercourse with their wives.

(some surprised murmurs)

You had a wife but...yeah. There was a council held in Trullo in Italy in 692 and that made celibacy for a bishop mandatory and if the bishop was married when he was appointed a bishop he had to separate from his wife before he was consecrated a bishop. ‘Am I going to be a bishop or am I going to be a husband?’ In 1022 Pope Benedict VIII banned marriages for priests.

*All these councils were held by men who were not married.*

That is a very interesting observation. I would presume that would be the case. It is one of the things I say about the Church today.

*Were they celibate?*

How do we know? I will be flip enough to say that ever since the rule of celibacy has been imposed in the Church it has been broken. That is no secret. And one of the things that I comment about the Church - and trust me, I love the Church, I am part of it and I choose to stay part of it every day of my life - but I also recognize something else: that major decisions are made by old celibate men. And that changes the dynamic doesn’t it? Anyway...

In 1022 Pope Benedict VII banned marriages for priests. Now this is coming out of the Church as it centralizes more in Rome. In 1075 Gregory VII banned married priests from celebrating Mass as well as performing all ecclesiastical functions. In 1123 the First Lateran Council declared any marriages contracted by deacons, priests and bishops to be invalid. In 1139 the Second Lateran Council affirmed everything from the

First Lateran Council and forbade priests to marry and declared any existing marriages to be null and void. And then finally in the 1500s the Council of Trent, which was the Council that dictated everything about the Church until the Second Vatican Council, remodeled celibacy to its present form and put in place the reforms necessary to ensure implementation of the Church decrees on this subject. And thus it has stayed ever since. Ever since then, the Church has upheld the teaching on celibacy.<sup>15</sup>

*It seems for the first thousand years, they kept forbidding it and forbidding it.*

The Church wasn't as centralized as it is today. So how does this get promulgated and who is going to be there to watch Father Valenti to make sure that he was not married or staying with his wife. Things were different in society and it is hard for us to imagine it being so different because things are so centralized today. And you live in Oakland. You know that what you had for breakfast everyone in Oakland knew about by about 11 o'clock. But it wasn't like that in those days. So they declared it any number of times in a number of different situations.

In 1967, Pope Paul VI had an Encyclical Letter about reaffirming the Church's unflinching stand on this. John Paul II said this: he had a synod where he maintained "The synod does not wish to leave any doubts in the mind of anyone regarding the Church's firm will to maintain the law that demands perpetual and freely chosen celibacy for present and future candidates for priestly ordination in the Latin rite."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sylvester U.N. Igboanyiku, 100 – 101.

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful on *The Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day*," *Libreria Editrice Vaticana* (March 1992) Chapter 3, 29.



And some of you guys chuckled - and I will do my aside once again - was it really chosen? That is quite an idealized statement, it really is. To me it is simply a reality. You also hear the Latin Rite - in the Eastern Rite, except in the United States, their priests are allowed to marry. Although they have to marry before they are ordained priests. And if that Eastern Rite priest from Europe comes to the United States, he gets to keep his wife.

Back to Paul VI...when he wrote his Encyclical in 1967, he addressed the issue of celibacy from four different vantage points:

One - what he called “Christological reasons for celibacy.” And this is what he said. He said “Christ remained throughout His whole life in the state of celibacy.”<sup>17</sup> I am going to stop right there. Do we know that? It is not addressed. It is the vantage point from which he speaks, “that Christ remained throughout his whole life in the state of celibacy, which signified his dedication to the service of God and humankind. This deep concern between celibacy and the priesthood of Christ is reflected in those whose fortune it is to share in the dignity and mission of the eternal priest. This sharing will be more perfect the freer the sacred minister is from the bonds of flesh and love.”<sup>18</sup>

There are those who say that Christ’s life on earth was too short and there is no proof that he wouldn’t have married if he had the opportunity to do that. The Gospel does quote Jesus, however, as saying that he had nowhere to lay his head. He makes reference to giving up brothers and sisters and lands, and all of this is looked upon as indicative of the fact that he led a celibate life.

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<sup>17</sup> Sylvester U.N. Igboanyika, 101.

<sup>18</sup> Sylvester U.N. Igboanyika, 101.

There are the Church reasons for celibacy. And this is “the image of Christ who has ‘loved the Church, His Body and offered himself entirely for her sake’ ... This position therefore means that the priest’s role as *father* leaves no room for marriage or natural procreation since he is already a major protagonist in a kind of supernatural ‘fecundity’ through his, faithful ‘marriage’ to the Church. He thus becomes the spiritual father of the children of God in the Church.”<sup>19</sup>

Third point. Pastoral reasons for celibacy. Paul VI wrote that “Celibacy gives priests maximum efficiency and the best disposition of mind mentally and emotionally for the continuous exercise of perfect charity... It guarantees them greater freedom and flexibility in the pastoral ministry. This makes the priest more available since he is free of family related matters.”<sup>20</sup>

And then the eschatological reasons for celibacy. “Celibacy is the sign of the Kingdom of God. In the midst of a world that is so involved in earthly concern and enslaved to desires of the flesh, the precious and divine gift of perfect continence for the Kingdom of God stands out as a special token of the rewards of heaven. The Catholic priesthood therefore links the material world with the spiritual.”<sup>21</sup>

Does this sound kind of idealistic? This is not to say that celibacy has not been questioned and that celibacy in today’s day and age is not being questioned. And I don’t mean by the media. It is being questioned everywhere.

Pope Benedict had a synod in 2005 and celibacy was affirmed even though there were some bishops at the synod that questioned its validity. One of the bishops from

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<sup>19</sup> Sylvester U.N. Igboanyika, 102.

<sup>20</sup> Sylvester U.N. Igboanyika, 102 – 103.

<sup>21</sup> Sylvester U.N. Igboanyika, 103.

Honduras said that, in his diocese, he has one priest for every 16,000 people. And he said this needs to change. It was not. Celibacy has been so much a part of the fabric of priesthood in the history of the Church that both John Paul II and Benedict XVI said it was not within their power to relax the requirement of celibacy for clerics.

*(I sigh.)* I stand back and I look at that and I say “is this a human law or a divine law?” We can debate that probably, but if it is human, it can be changed, right? Would relaxing celibacy bring more men into the priesthood? What are your answers? I don’t know.

*Yes.*

*Probably.*

*I wonder about that.*

*And if someone became a priest, he’d have to be a pauper priest.*

*What about other Churches?*

You can’t make a comparison, John. Pastors can function and still have a family. Yes. I have a lot of friends who are Protestant Pastors and, of course, our systems are very, very different.

You guys from Our Lady of Perpetual Help: Bob Connors left one day and I arrived the next and you guys had nothing to say about anything. There was a time when that was a little bit different under Archbishop Gerety, but Archbishop McCarrick changed that a lot.

In any event, my brothers and sisters who are pastors in various Protestant Churches, when there is an opening in their parish, there is a search committee that looks for a pastor and they interview. And one of the things, of course, in the third or the fourth

interview, are salary negotiations. And let me tell you, my Protestant brethren are paid pretty well. This is the whole thing with tithing. It is ten percent and even sometimes more. You say the word tithe and ten percent to the average Catholic and he looks at you like you have three heads. (Laughter)

One of my friends got married in the Lutheran church and her husband is on one of the boards; and he was telling me how much his pastor makes. I watched the pastor drive out after their wedding rehearsal and he had a really nice car and he is paid really, really well. So we can't make those comparisons, at least right now. Let me get back to this...

Would there be more guys becoming priests if we relaxed celibacy? We don't know - we have nothing to compare this with.

*Do other Churches have the same problem with people going into ministry as the Catholics do? That's a way we could compare.*

*Do the Muslim clerics get married?*

Let me talk a little bit more about this. I am glad you guys are thinking and questioning, this is always my purpose when talking to a group. When I am talking to the Genesis Group, I constantly say in those sessions - *think* - you have a right to *think*. But let's also recognize something else. There is more to priesthood than not having sex. And that is important for all of us to remember. Sex is important and I think it is important all the time, but as we age...Let me ask some of my peers here: doesn't relationship and companionship become more important than just sex?

For me the sex would be nice. And I look back on the years that I wasted...(Hearty laughter)

for me seriously, the sex would be nice but I tell you the truth, more than anything else I wish I weren't alone in life. The older I get, the more painfully aware of the fact that I am alone in life. And the older I get, the more I hate it. Sometimes people say really pietistic stuff like 'The parish is your family.' No, it is not. (Laughter)

'No, you are not alone. you have the whole parish.' No, I don't. I can count on maybe five or six hands how many parishioner houses I have been in in the fourteen years that I have been at Our Lady of Perpetual Help. And I named them all for myself about a year ago.

I am not the first person anyone calls with good news or bad news. I am not the most important person in anybody's life. And I don't like that. I know I missed out on something. I know that. Someone said something to me about a week ago at Discovering Christ: "Well you are not sorry about anything are you?" In a sense no, in a sense yes: got to be honest. I am a human being.

"Celibacy...is an extreme form of religious asceticism."<sup>22</sup> Yes, no question about that. But isn't 'self-control or self-mastery one of the essential developmental life tasks?' Isn't that a key ingredient to maturation? 'Morality is not possible without the ability to restrain impulses and redirect our desires. For a culture or a society to exist and flourish, it depends upon an understanding and a practice of restraint.'<sup>23</sup>

As I said earlier the longest distance is from here to here. That is what I had to do when signing my papers and making a vow of celibacy. I had to internalize it from intention to achievement. Images are important to me. I have very stately images of the

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<sup>22</sup> A.W. Richard Sipe, 545.

<sup>23</sup> A. W. Richard Sipe, 545 – 546.

priests in my parish when I was growing up. One of the last things I ever wanted to do was become an altar boy. My mother made me become an altar boy. I used to say, see Ma, you made me become an altar boy and look what happened. But it was really good for me, good for my socialization. And it had me in the company of priests whom I really admired, I really looked up to. I can still remember the priest who I most looked up to and wanted to be like, even though in the beginning of my senior year of high school, he left and got married.

On the other hand of religious asceticism and self mastery, since our sex drive is so basic, celibacy is a very rare life choice, or as I like to say: a life reality. Although some do, I do not think of celibacy as the sacrifice made in faith as anything heroic. Because remember something gentlemen, in Catholic theology the moral bar is set for everyone who is outside of a marital relationship to be celibate. It might sound a little bit old fashioned but it is true and in a day an age when most couples cohabit before marriage, this sounds really outdated but it is not.

Who doesn't know a couple who is cohabitating? My nephew is living with his girlfriend, much to Uncle Tommy's dismay. I sent him a wedding card and a wedding gift on the day that his lease was taking place and I said 'I am not going to lie and say that I didn't wish you would solemnize your vows in a church ceremony but since you are entering into a common law marriage I will stand by your decision.' He tore up the check and sent it back to me, but I wanted to make a point. It is just so common, and that becomes our next discussion when we talk about marriage. So much of what I am saying about celibacy seems so outdated and so old fashioned in light of the society in which we live.

Celibacy needs to be seen as a contractual tie between the Church and her members, because we hold it in high esteem, don't we? We don't have to think very long and hard to see that the public and flagrant disregard for celibacy and the harm that it has done to the church.

Should celibacy be relaxed or should it be maintained? That is a debate. I always say about myself that I have a curse and a blessing. I have the gift of being able to see both sides of every issue. On the one hand as I stand and talk about this stuff for the last few minutes, I am probably one of the last guys who would ever relax celibacy in the Catholic Church. But on the other hand...

John H. was born and raised in Midland Park. He was ordained in 1972. I was ordained in 1978. And that is the basic age difference between us. I got to know John because he was a priest at Our Lady of Lourdes in West Orange and I was assigned in an apostolic assignment to his Religious Education Program my second year in the seminary. We became fast friends and we remained friends for many, many years: friend enough that we set up his sister and my brother on a blind date. We thought it would be really cool if his sister and my brother married each other.

I loved John H. really great guy. How great of a guy was he? When he decided he was in Our Lady of Lourdes, West Orange long enough, he wanted to get a transfer. And he said to the personnel department, such as it exists in the Archdiocese of Newark, he said 'I am not going to look at any parishes, I am not going to go interviewing with any pastors. I want to leave Lourdes, it is time for me to go. I want you to assign me to the parish that no other priest wants to go to.'

And so he was assigned as the associate to Saint Charles Borromeo in the Weequahic section of Newark. And when Jim F. left there as pastor, John became the pastor. Affable, athletic, good looking, great guy. I loved John H. And then he hired a young Sister of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill to be Pastoral Associate at Saint Charles Borromeo in the Weequahic section of Newark. And the regional superior at the time, which I would subsequently find out, was one Sister Harriet Corrigan who, when she went to see this nun in the assignment that she had taken at Saint Charles Borromeo in the Weequahic section of Newark - I got this part from Harriet: "I said to her, 'Girl, you'd better know what you are about. You'd better know what you are about. He is young, he is good looking, you'd better know what you are about.'" And well, she did know what she was about, and John knew what he was about.

And so I was having a meeting one day with Archbishop McCarrick about a whole variety of things. And one of the things I said to him, as I was having my private audience with the Archbishop, I said, "I guess I should express my sympathy over John H." And he nodded his head and he said, "Oh yes, he has had this problem for a long time." and I said, "Problem? Problem? He fell in love. That's not a problem. Love is a gift from God. How can you say it is a problem?" I said, "You know Archbishop, I am probably the last guy to relax the rule on celibacy in the Church, but we have to be discussing this. We are not talking about Joe Jerk having left the priesthood. We are talking about somebody of the caliber of John H. leaving the priesthood because he fell in love with a woman. And it broke the heart of his parishioners.

At the last Mass that he was preaching at - they all knew he was leaving and that she was leaving and they were going to pursue their relationship and probably get



married - when he got out of the pulpit for the last time, the entire congregation stood up and they sang to him his favorite song. They were weeping. Now what would be wrong with the two of them being married and ministering in this parish that nobody else wants to get assigned to? What would be so wrong about that?" And he said, "But it is not allowed." I said "I know it is not allowed but we have to start to talk about this. You guys with the mitered heads have to at least be discussing this, you have to put this on the dockets of the meetings when you have national meetings of the bishops because we are losing really great guys because they are falling in love and we have to do something about it. If it were Joe Jerk, I wouldn't care, but it is John H. and there is a difference here."

In a 1970 Synod of Bishops under Paul VI, the bishops who were present at the synod voted 55 to 45 percent to keep mandatory celibacy. Not much of a plurality is it? That was in 1970. Now there are those who criticize the Church, saying that the celibacy requirement is crucial to the Church's claim to power and domination and is essential to the face it wishes to show to the world. As part of that system, I have never seen it that way. I have never understood it that way. On a personal level, I don't approach things that way. I don't believe that celibacy gives me any particular power or domination. And in the same breath, however, I don't want to be seen as someone different. I don't want to be seen as "other."

In October of my first year of ordination, I was ordained in May and now it was October. I was going on a Cursillo Weekend as a candidate and the first night was supposed to be silent. It was the silent retreat part. I was twenty-seven years old and I was no sooner in bed and the door opened and my roommate came barreling in - Robert R. by

name - and Robert said, "how're you doing? My name is Robert." And well, you don't have to tell me twice, I can keep on talking.

So he goes into his bed and I was in mine and we were talking back and forth and getting to know each other and really enjoying each other's company. He was twenty-four or twenty-five at the time, relatively newly married and we are talking back and forth. And he said, "So are you married?" And I didn't want anybody to know I was a priest. And I said "no," and I could just hear the ice go across the room. And I think, this guy thinks I am going to jump his bones. I am a young guy and I am not married and this is what goes through this guy's head, because why would he have been silent? And I thought, well, I have got to tell him. I said, "I'm a priest." "Hahahaha you are so funny! Wait, you're serious." I said, "yes I am serious but please I want to keep it quiet on the weekend and I don't want people to look at me like I have all the answers so please just keep it quiet between you and me." "Okay, okay."

I am in situations, maybe at the gym, and I get to talking with some guys. 'Got kids? Married?' I don't want to tell them I am a priest. But damn, I hate saying I am not married and I have no kids.

Now our topic tonight is a slash. Celibacy/Married Clergy. Could the Catholic Church have married clergy? As we have pointed out already, it works in other religions. No question about it. I go to school and I am with a bunch of other pastors and I am the only single guy. There are women and there are men. One of the women is married to another woman. One of the guys is married to another guy. But everyone else is in a heterosexual relationship. And all of these guys and women are somewhat in awe of me.

‘Really? You are a Catholic priest? Really? Wow.’ They are somewhat in awe and as I said before, I don’t like feeling different. It makes me feel awkward.

We do have married priests. In the United States. We have converted Episcopalian priests. And these guys are married and they come into the Church and - I don’t want to question anybody’s sincerity in leaving the Episcopal church to become a Catholic priest - I just hope that none of these guys - and I know some of them do - are leaving the Episcopal Church because they are opposed to women’s ordination. I don’t like to think that guys become Catholic because they don’t want to share clerical status with the women. But we have a couple of them in the Archdiocese of Newark and let me tell you it burns me up. None of them is assigned to a parish. They are in hospital ministries and stuff like that, but a number of years ago when I was pastor in East Orange, Archbishop McCarrick had a meeting for pastors who were getting newly ordained priests. And I was getting a newly ordained priest, so I had to be part of this meeting. At this meeting, Archbishop McCarrick announced that he was going to be ordaining, quietly and privately, this Episcopalian priest who had converted from being Episcopalian to being Catholic. And this is what he said, ‘He is married. He has children, so of course I am going to give him a living wage.’ And I could just feel the hair on the back of my neck stand up.’

And of course, these aren’t situations where you can challenge something like that. Here I’ll stand and challenge it. It really burned me up. It really did. This guy is married, he is coming into the Church, he keeps his wife, and you are going to give him the proper salary to support his wife and his children. And what about the rest of us dolts? You know, if you guys didn’t give me housing, I would qualify for food stamps. That’s

what my salary is. And I heard that and I thought: it is just so unfair. It burned me up then and it still does.

There is not a loophole. A Catholic guy cannot convert and become an Episcopalian, get married, become an Episcopalian priest and then come back to the Catholic Church. You can't get around that. That is not a loophole. Some say that we get around the whole idea about having a married clergy by having a permanent diaconate. When a guy is ordained a deacon, if he is not married, he has to take a vow of celibacy. And if a guy is married when he is ordained a deacon, if his wife dies, he is not allowed to remarry, unless the bishop gives permission. In my sister's parish in Spring Lake last year there was a youngish deacon in his 40s and his wife died and he fell in love and he wanted to get married. And he approached Bishop Smith of the Trenton Diocese who would not give him a dispensation. The guy had a choice, remain a deacon or get married. Guess what he chose? He got married and he stopped functioning as a deacon.

How could a married clergy work in the Catholic Church? In our situation at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, it would be a little easier. I am assigned alone. MBS has a bishop, John Job, Michael Donovan lives there, he used to be associate there and works at DePaul Catholic, they have a weekend, Joe Chapel. You got four guys there. How does this work? Somebody brought up before about salary. Salary would be different. Housing would be different. So if you are not going to supply the housing that every Catholic parish does, then you are going to have to supply the salary that is going to be enough for a guy to pay rent, get a mortgage. Somebody brought this up before what would happen if the priests gets divorced, since 50 percent of marriages end that way anyway. For you guys who say I think priests ought to get married, how would you adjust

to the single priest getting assigned to your parish who is dating? And should he be allowed to date women in the congregation?

I said before that for me I am a lonely guy and this might sound strange to you, but in the midst of my schedule and all of the things that I have got to get done, I feel guilty about the time that I don't spend with Atticus. Let alone how I would be if I had a wife, kids and grandkids. I pay attention to my schedule to make sure that there is a night or two that I am in. And there is nothing to eat in the house and I think that I should just run out and get something to eat. Take a book or take my laptop and get a table and get something to eat and sit at a table by myself. And I think along the lines of - I have been out of the house all day long and Atticus has been by himself and it is just not fair to the animal that I am gone so much. So the whole way that we have Catholic priesthood mapped out really doesn't make a lot of wiggle room for wife and kids. It would require a real change of mindset among the faithful. It is easy to say priests should get married but I want you to think about it. Do you really mean that?

Easter Sunday of my deacon year, a little less than two months before my ordination to the priesthood, I went through a crisis. I was at a mass, and I wasn't preaching the mass, the priest celebrant was, and while he was preaching, I was looking at the congregation. And the church had a funky setup - they had chairs in the round - and I was looking at this young guy who was in the church for mass by himself. He wore aviator shaped glasses, and so did I. He had a brown tint to his lens and so did I. And he is there with two little boys who are maybe two and three. They are fussing all over the place and he picked one up and put him on the chair and the other one would go down and as he is taking care of one, the other one - and back and forth so he was really

attracting my attention because on one hand I thought he and I looked somewhat alike if you would describe him and describe me. And I am looking at the boys and I just started doing this....I was trying to decide if his two boys looked like him. And I became obsessed with wanting to know what my kids would look like. And after masses and locking up the church I laid down and tried to nap, Grace Jones was playing softly on my stereo in the background. And the following day at lunch my pastor and I were having lunch by ourselves. He started questioning my moods, he said something is happening, what is the matter? What is going on? And I said to him, 'Tom I am thinking about not getting ordained.' 'What are you talking about? It is less than two months away.' I said I want to know what my kids would look like. And he just did this....yeah, I know. I said you wanted to know what your kids would look like? He said all of us do. I said really? He said yeah. You felt that way? Yeah, I still think of it.

Maybe this is TMI but I was thinking about it when I was taking care of my dying mother. I thought how neat it would be if she had a grandchild by way of me. It was a difficult time, my brother-in-law had open-heart surgery, triple bypass while my mother was dying in Oakland. So my sister was up with her husband in Connecticut, my 14 year old nephew was by himself in Spring Lake, and my two nieces were back at school. And it would have been nice to have a son sitting with me. It never went away.

And so my pastor and I talked that day and we talked the following day and any number of times later and on May 27, 1978 I walked down the aisle of Sacred Heart Cathedral in Newark and I publicly affirmed once again everything you guys read in that letter. As I said, do I still wonder? Yup. But it is all water under the bridge now. It doesn't make any difference. So don't think of me as noble or pathetic. Because, like

you, whoever you are, and whatever your life is, you get up in the morning and you affirm your life and you live it to the best of your ability. And that is exactly what I do too.

Now as I bring us to a conclusion, I ask once again, questions, comments....Donald?

*You brought up before that everyone says that you have to come up to date, be modern. You can say that about my marriage too. Marriage is something that is almost frowned upon now. So are we supposed to come up to date and be like your nephew?*

Don't impugn my nephew...no I understand what your saying.  
*Our society encourages it. People don't say together, if it doesn't work out, get divorced – it's the easiest thing in the world.*

We will probably bring that up when we talk about marriage next time around but there are articles being written of a very strange dynamic that is happening in the United States - that heterosexual couples are eschewing the whole notion of marriage and gay couples want it. It is an interesting phenomenon. You can say we can change with the times, I am one of those who say that a lot of the stuff about the times stinks. John?  
*I just want to make a comment. I have been in both states.*

Insanity and what? (Hearty laughter)  
*Marriage can be a state of insanity.*

That is for you to say, brother, not me. And you could have done so much good by helping people get through that encyclical by staying a priest, John. Instead of walking away from it you could have stayed in and you could have helped people understand that encyclical but you chose not to do that.

*My point is, that I been in both states and they're very much the same. They both have their ups and downs. Both states have their problems.*

Life has its problems...any other observations? Yes, Kevin please...

*What strikes me is the comments of the what ifs. I think that no matter what our situation, we self-analyze, what we could have been. One of the things that you did not bring up is what I think every priest needs and has – compassion.*

Yup I will agree with that. Absolutely. Another Kevin...

(A lengthy comment and question was raised about the letter I was required to write prior to ordination requesting the vow of celibacy. We went back and forth about notions of celibacy and being married to the Church.)

Once again, those are not original to us those are forms that we are to follow.... It is what celibacy implies, because you can start splitting hairs as to what it means. It means a life without genital sex and sexual gratification. It means not having a relationship that gets in the way of ministry. That is what it implies, it implies all of those things. ...I listened to a guy say that a couple of months ago, yes there is that commitment to the church. That is not how I see it for myself. I don't consider myself married to the church. I am dedicated to the church, I am part of the church, I am a priest of the church, a priest of God, a priest of Jesus Christ, I just don't use the word married in that context. That is just me. I listened to a guy talk about that a couple of months ago and I was watching him as he did it and he stopped and he said he could tell I was disagreeing with him, and I said I wasn't disagreeing it was just terminology that I myself don't use. Edward...



*One of the things I thought about when you were speaking. You didn't say anything that the Bishops who made these decisions really had any basis to make these decisions.*

There are vague references in New Testament letters, yes, and building on what they saw with Jesus as far as the twelve and them apart, but as far as any real, solid scriptural basis, it isn't there. It isn't there. So I wasn't going to tell you that something is there when it is not.

*I'm thinking how ironic it is. To allow a priest to marry seems like a very compassionate thing to allow. But two questions: What if you were dating a member of the congregation and what if you were divorced. I would think that a hundred years ago, it would have been much more practical because like was more traditional. But today with cohabitation and everything, it would be more difficult. I came into this believing that celibacy is ridiculous.*

Okay, you're thinking and that's good.

One of my friends is very active in his Episcopalian parish, he was born and raised Catholic and his wife is very active in the Episcopalian church so they had one religion and church and so he made the profession of faith in the Episcopalian church. He was telling me that he was part of the board that does the interviewing for the potential pastor. In the Episcopalian discipline these days, at the second interview of the potential pastor, full sexual disclosure has to take place. And so for the last guy that they hired to be their pastor - and this is the Episcopalian church on Bloomfield Avenue if you want a reference point as to where this place is. At the second meeting, they asked this guy and he said that he is in a committed relationship with another man and one of the board

members said that if we hire this guy my family and I are going to leave the parish and they hired him and he did.

We have Bishop Gene Robinson up in New Hampshire right? It is just a whole different ball game what is happening in the Episcopalian church. For the first Sunday of Advent, it depends upon the local Episcopalian bishop, but they now have a ritual in the Episcopalian Church for a same sex union.

So when this female Episcopalian priest told me 'oh I got married last week,' I asked 'oh did your bishop do it?' This is what she said, she said, 'No no he is going to do it next year.' So I said you 'are going to do it again next year?' She said, 'yeah, we just got married civilly last Friday and we are going to have a big church wedding next year.' I said, 'really?' She said, 'yeah, come on. It takes two straight people a year to plan a marriage, why shouldn't it take two lesbians a year to plan a marriage?' I said, oh, 'okay.' But that is a whole different ball game. When her board found out that she was cohabitating with a woman, they said how does this affect us? And they decided it didn't affect them at all. There is a lot of stuff going on out there.

Let's conclude with a prayer and then I am going to give you evaluation sheets once again.

God our Father we thank you for opening our minds and stretching our minds a little bit and helping us to think in ways we never thought before; to re-think things that we have taken for granted and wondered about. And so we ask that you continue to guide the Church, whether we have a mandatory celibate priesthood or whether we have optional, whether things change - we don't know what the future has in store for us but we know that no matter what happens we know that your son Jesus is walking with us

and guiding us and guarding us and sending His spirit to lead us and guide us and sometimes challenge us in a variety of ways. And so dear Lord we thank you for the opportunity of gathering together to take on a very serious topic, but one which affects all of us, priest and lay people alike. Where it affects us in the Church, which is still in need of growth and, once again, still in need of healing. And so we make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Appendix G**  
**Invitation to Saint Joseph's Day**  
**Mass and Dinner**

**Rev. Thomas Paul Lipnicki**  
**Chaplain, Knights of Columbus**  
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March 7, 2013

My dear brother Knight,

This past Friday evening we had another of our **Faith Fridays**. The topic *Celibacy/Married Clergy* was both eye opening and thought provoking. I enjoyed making the presentation and hearing the comments, observations and questions of our brother Knights who were there. More than one of our brothers commented to me that he had come with one particular idea about the subject and left with a different opinion. In one way or another, celibacy is on the minds of a lot of people both within and outside the Catholic Church.

Tuesday March 19<sup>th</sup> is **the Feast of Saint Joseph** – the Patron of Men: fathers, husbands, sons, brothers, uncles, nephews. (Each one of us falls into at least one of those categories!) We have oftentimes had a **Saint Joseph's Men's Dinner** at Our Lady of Perpetual Help but this year I invite you to a *Knights-only Saint Joseph's Men's Dinner* on that Tuesday, March 19<sup>th</sup>. Following the responses to January's Questionnaire, the topic of the evening's presentation will be *Marriage*, with the Mass homily focusing on *the Role of Men*.

The evening will begin with Mass at 6 o'clock at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, followed by dinner at 7 o'clock at the Knights Hall. I invite you to this dinner as my personal guest, but as far as the bar is concerned – you'll be on your own!

For the purpose of both Hall set-up and the ordering of food (Café l'Amore), please send back the enclosed response card to me by Friday, March 15<sup>th</sup>. Please sign your name legibly!!

I hope to see you on Tuesday the 19<sup>th</sup>, an evening for us to celebrate our Vocation as Catholic Men!

Sincerely,

Rev. Thomas Paul Lipnicki

## **Appendix H**

### **Saint Joseph Day Homily**

So far the two presentations that I have made to my brother Knights have been taken from the suggestions from the questionnaires that I sent out to you guys back in January. So far we have considered Scripture, we have considered Celibacy and Married Clergy. Our Good Friday Service is going to take into consideration Eternal Life and various facets and ideas around that. During our dinner tonight we are going to talk about Marriage and right now for this Mass in honor of St. Joseph, patron of the Church, patron of men, I want to talk about the role of men in the Church.

That is quite an irony, to talk about the role of men in the church because on the one hand, we have a patriarchal Church, there is no question about that. But on the other side of things, there are many more women who are active in the Church than there are men.

We know that ordained ministry is the solitary bastion of men, yet the ministries that fulfill the tremendous pastoral needs of the Church are female dominated: Religious Education Teachers, Religious Education Directors, Lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, Pastoral Associates. All these are female dominated. We can point to one that isn't: A female usher? Oh my goodness, we can't have female ushers...that's guys.

Maybe some of what I just said is attributable to the disparity of salaries, more men are principal breadwinners than women, so women can take a lesser paying job than a man can. The Church is notorious for not paying living wages. My brother used to say that the great crime of the Catholic Church is the way it pays its clergy. He didn't live

long enough to see what the great crime of the Church has been - but that is not our topic here.

Whether we paid very close attention or just casual attention to the conclave of last week, we knew it was going on. We knew there were 115 men gathering together to elect the man who would become Pope. Now honestly, did you identify with any of these guys? No? I mean they are men but they are different from you aren't they? They are different from me too. Not quite as different but I don't know how many average guys identify with those 115 Cardinals who got together to elect the Pope.

Maybe that is one of the difficulties of speaking about the role of men in the Church. For the most part, the men who are involved in the Church are ordained - and you're not - so maybe erroneously you think that there is no real role for you in the Church because of that. Women can't be ordained so they can fulfill all kinds of roles that don't require ordination. Maybe in this process men feel as though they are off the hook. Ordained guys and all those laywomen can take care of all the business of the Church.

You know the two times I had the most men volunteer for anything here at Our Lady of Perpetual Help? One was a clean up day that I organized during my first year here. All kinds of guys came out with their chain saws and various tools of their trade to participate. The other was on Memorial Day 2009 when the renovation of this Church House began. I asked for guys to come together to empty out all kinds of stuff that was in here and guys came out in droves.

Look at the way you Knights of Columbus - I wasn't a Knight at the time so I have to say you Knights of Columbus in this particular setting. Look at the way you

Knights of Columbus came out and volunteered to refurbish the council hall when all of the silliness of the possibility of selling the building to Wyckoff Ford went away. You guys were out there in droves refurbishing that building. Is that all that men are good for - mindless physical work? Women and clergy can serve and think and regular guys just grunt, is that it?

Let me ask you another question - it's Saint Joseph Day - Patron of fathers, I like to expand it as Patron of Men, husbands, fathers, brother, sons. St. Joseph is everyman. That is cool isn't it? Now I am going to step on a couple of sensitivities here with my next question. But I am going to do it anyway, we are guys here, we can talk, right? Do you identify with St. Joseph? Can you identify with a guy who never had sex with his wife? Honestly, do you see St. Joseph as an ordinary guy just like you? Hey Joe, your fiancée is pregnant. You know the baby is not yours, but don't worry - it is not some other guy's either. She is with child by way of the Holy Spirit. Now how would any of you guys react to that situation if you found yourself in it?

So if you don't identify with the Cardinals, do you honestly see yourself as Saint Joseph? And not disrespect to you as men by any stretch of the imagination, but if we look at him as a normal, mortal human being like you and me, do you really identify with what he did and how he reacted?

So exactly where is the Catholic layman in all of this? Who exactly is the Catholic layman? What exactly is the Catholic layman in all of this. For the next part of my little talk here I am going to draw on Matthew Fox. Matthew Fox had been a Dominican priest. It is not that he is dead - he was thrown out of his Dominican order and so he is no longer

a functioning Catholic priest because they asked him to leave. He wrote a book called “The Hidden Spirituality of Men: Ten Metaphors to Awaken the Sacred Masculine.”

I am not going to give you a précis of this book, but just the title gives us a little more credit than I think we give ourselves. I say we because I see myself smack dab in the middle of this situation with you. Where would I be in the Church if I weren’t a priest? I say “we” because I am not always particularly in touch with the spirit within. I say “we” because as much as I like to call what I do this transcendent vocation - it is oftentimes a job. And while I fulfill its requirements, I am not always as Christ centered as I should be and I am not always as Christ centered as I would like to be.

In his book, Fox quotes another author, and I don’t want to mention too many names so this other author is going to go unmentioned. This other author says that the spirituality of men has “been repressed, a secret from ourselves. Many men have a misunderstanding of masculinity and would categorize anything spiritual as something less than masculine, something feminine. A rejection of an intrinsic part of who we are as men.”

Fox claims that “One of the best kept secrets of our culture is that many men are deeply spiritual and care deeply about their spiritual life.”<sup>24</sup> He says secret because it is hidden - often from ourselves. He says there are many reasons for that. I am going to highlight several of them - seven to be exact - that either resonate with me or I see present in other guys.

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew Fox, xi.



1. We are victims of Western culture which is itself another patriarchy: thinking is valued over feeling, material wealth over spiritual wealth, scientific fact over intuitive knowledge, men over women, heterosexuals over homosexuals.

I think of my own parents. My mother wanted to get a job outside the home. Our family needed two salaries, but my father didn't want to admit that and he would always say, "no wife of mine is going to go to work." Strength. Discipline. Even my mother. I studied language and linguistics, my brother majored in the sciences. My mother was very quick to point out that he had a tough major while she mocked mine. What is it that makes us strong as men?

2. Men are rarely rewarded, and often mocked, for openly expressing our deepest feelings of joy, sensitivity and pain.

My father used to ridicule me for crying or for having emotions. I always say it takes a real man to cry. Remember when Hilary Clinton lost one of the primaries and she was seen crying? She was criticized for being weak. After all, she was playing a man's game. We can reflect on what it means to be a man but women seem to have to worry about what it means to be a woman.

3. Many men carry wounds inside they would rather forget or put aside than admit are there.

Men, who are not supposed to cry, learn to hide their grief as well as their joy. Each one of you could probably give me an example of a wound from your own life without a second's thought, a wound that you would prefer not to talk about, not to think about.

4. Men sometime work so hard that they do not have time or space for exploring their hearts.

I really see myself in this one. I know I should meditate. I think along the lines that after Mass, every day, I should be kneeling in front of the Blessed Sacrament. But I also know that if I would do that, all I would be thinking about is what's waiting for me over in the office. What are the daily deadlines that are hanging over my head? You too? Honestly, what's up with your prayer life?

5. Our culture more often rewards men for their extroverted rather than their introverted sides.

One of my friends who I have known since my seminary days e-mailed me the other day and said he feels that he needs to complete and see something to the end. He said: my life seems to be a series of aborted attempts. So I wrote back to him, like what? I already knew the answer to the question but I wanted to hear it from him.

And he mentioned ordination, marriage and music. His introversion was never rewarded. He was ordained a transitional deacon, but the priests of the parish had not recommended he be ordained a priest and the seminary faculty went along, so he did not get ordained a priest and that was one of his disappointments.

He got married, and that didn't work out either. In his introversion, an outside woman came on to him and he succumbed, time and time again, and he lost his marriage in that process.

He is also a musician. He is not the kind of guy who would sell himself and advertise his talent: 'well, if people don't like my music then to hell with them.' And so in his introversion, he never found himself getting rewarded and when he looks back on

his life he says, ‘I didn’t push myself,’ because we reward the extroverts, not the introvert.

6. Men want to hide their shame or aggression or at least hide from them.

Sometimes, in an attempt to respect the women’s movement, some men feel compelled to silence themselves and hide any unacceptable maleness. Men don’t know how and are not trained to deal with their anger and outrage in healthy ways.

I see myself in that, do you? What does it take to be a male in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? How much of a man does one have to be in order to be a man?

7. Like everyone else, men can be lazy and will avoid the hard work of spiritual exploration if we can.<sup>25</sup>

Cynicism, depression and exhaustion can make soul work seem pointless and overwhelming.

The more we fill our lives with stuff and the more we fill our lives with things to do the less time we will have to think about what really matters and what we are going to take with us when we leave this world. What is the line we hear? The guy who dies with the most toys wins? We don’t think about the spiritual side, we think about the material on a regular basis.

The Country-Western classic “Stand By Your Man” begins with the lyric: “Sometimes it’s hard to be a woman.” Well brothers, I am going to say it is not so easy being a man either. What does society expect of us? What do our families expect of us? What does God expect of us? What do we expect of ourselves as men in the world and men in the Church?

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<sup>25</sup> Matthew Fox, xii – xiii.

The notion that it is a man's world has changed these past few decades but it also doesn't mean that men are relegated to the sidelines either in the world or in the Church. Jesus got angry and Jesus wept. Jesus prayed and Jesus drank. Jesus mentored and Jesus listened. Jesus surrounded himself with people, and Jesus went off by himself to pray. And Jesus was man enough to get arrested, scourged, carry a cross, and ultimately be nailed to it and die. No weakling, that Jesus, who build his Church on that rough and gruff Peter, whose successor - those men dressed in fine and even gaudy red robes - got together to select last week.

So what is the role of the layman in the Church? The possibilities are endless, as soon as we remove our self-imposed restrictions. Brothers, don't be afraid to use your brain and to follow your heart in the service of God and God's people. Saint Joseph obviously thought, at first, that he couldn't manage what lay ahead of him, what he did not choose to happen in his life. But God was there: God's strength, and God's power, and God's grace.

And so here is a truly concrete way to take Saint Joseph as your personal patron. You think you can't? You think you don't know where to start? You think you don't even want to. Think again. Because Joseph did it and so can you. Joseph did great things for God and God's people and so can you. And if not you - then who?

God bless you.

## Appendix I Matrimony

What I am going to say about matrimony tonight is obviously not given from a husband's or a wife's perspective. This is obviously not going to be a marriage preparation course; this is not a marriage counseling session. We are speaking about the ideal of marriage and of living that ideal, while knowing that married life doesn't always live up to the ideal, any more than our baptism or our confirmation or even our ordination does.

Before I focus on the Sacrament of Matrimony, how about a few general observations about sacraments. How many are there? Who can name them? Dan go ahead... (one of the members names all seven)

Who can define what a sacrament is for me all you Baltimore Catechism boys?  
 "A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace."<sup>26</sup>

Vatican II said, "The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify, build up the Body of Christ and finally give worship to God."<sup>27</sup> And so in a general sense, a sacrament can be any object, person or thing that somehow brings God and creation into contact. Anything that reveals God's saving love can be called a sacrament. And so we can call Jesus a Sacrament because he brings God and people together. We can call the Church a sacrament because it brings God and his people together.

*How about Saints?*

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<sup>26</sup> Francis J. Connell, *The New Baltimore Catechism*, (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1941), 198.

<sup>27</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, trans. Joseph Gallagher, (Washington, D.C., The America Press, 1966), 158.

Saints? No, I don't think so.

The Church numbers seven particular actions as sacraments. They are not arbitrary choices, every one of these seven grace filled actions is found in the New Testament, even if we don't find them in an exact ritual form, because Jesus established sacraments, and not blueprints. What I just said has been a discussion and a debate ever since the Reformation.

Because faith cannot happen and cannot grow in solitude, sacraments also are not private events. And so matrimony involves, yes, just two people, but it is public. It is a sacrament. It is celebrated in public. It is an encounter, a very public encounter with Christ amidst the assembled, supportive community. We believe Christ sanctified marriage by his presence at Cana and that he sanctifies every Christian marriage by his presence in that marriage.

Sacraments use signs. We just celebrated Eucharist. We used bread. We used wine. We mentioned the Anointing of the Sick: oil. Also used in Confirmation. Used in Baptism. Used in Holy Orders. And all these signs signify Christ's ongoing presence.

The sign in marriage, gentlemen? How many of you are married? Just about all of us. A couple of us are not. The sign in marriage is the enduring love that you and your wife have for each other. The sign of matrimony is the commitment of the couple. As Christ said to the apostles, as Christ said to the Church: 'I will be with you always.' That is what you guys said to your wives on your wedding day and that is what Jesus also said to you on your wedding day. 'I will be with you always.' As God made a covenant with his people over and over again, so the husband and wife make a covenant agreement with each other on their wedding day that they are called to live out every day. As God would

say to His people, 'I will not leave you orphaned,' those are the words that you said to your wife on your wedding day, 'I will not leave you orphaned.' As Christ gave himself totally for the Church, so do you as husbands give yourself totally to your wife. As Jesus would say in Matthew and Mark's Gospels reporting what Jesus said so graphically, that 'the two shall be as one,' you are no longer two but one flesh. Think about how graphic an image that is that you and your wife become one body. There is nothing separating the two of you.

Father Lew Papera, a priest I know in Hasbrouck Heights, is very fond of saying, that every time a husband and a wife make love with each other that they are renewing their marriage vows. Isn't that a nice image, gentlemen? Every lovemaking experience with your wife is renewing the vows that you made.

This is what the Baltimore Catechism says the Sacrament of Matrimony is: "Matrimony is the sacrament by which a baptized man and a baptized woman bind themselves for life in a lawful marriage and receive the grace to discharge their duties."<sup>28</sup>

Do baptized people marry non-baptized people? Every day. But we get dispensations and permissions for that. A wonderful contemporary German theologian said, "A consideration of marriage as a sacrament can begin with the consideration that puberty, marriage, sexuality, and giving birth have been connected with religious symbolism in nearly every culture."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Francis J. Connell, 315.

<sup>29</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, 284.

The Baltimore Catechism: “When was marriage first instituted? Marriage was first instituted in the Garden of Eden, when God created Adam and Eve and made them husband and wife.”<sup>30</sup>

That can be a little bit of a stretch, because God never called Adam and Eve husband and wife. Adam and Eve never call each other husband and wife. The narrator eventually, after he says partner and helper, and after Adam says “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh,”<sup>31</sup> the narration says what we hear many, many times: “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh,” - again, that very graphic image - and the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.”<sup>32</sup> I guess they were very young and she was still perky and he had an 8-pack!

The German theologian I mentioned before says, “It can and must be asked whether the relationship of two persons spoken of in Genesis can be called ‘marriage,’ given the meaning of the word as we use it today.”<sup>33</sup>

The Baltimore Catechism: When was marriage made a sacrament? Marriage was made a sacrament for baptized persons by Our Lord some time in the course of His life on earth, as we know especially from the constant tradition of the Church.<sup>34</sup>

And that is what we say as Catholics. That is not what Luther and the other reformed churches say. According to Luther, marriage is not a sacrament. He said,

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<sup>30</sup> Francis J. Connell, 315.

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 2: 23

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 2: 24

<sup>33</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, 284.

<sup>34</sup> Francis J. Connell, 315.



“Marriage is not a sacrament, since the New Testament contains no word of Christ promising a sacrament of marriage, but on the basis of the order of creation it is a sign - it is a parable - of God’s gracious action, and now it is a sign of the union of Christ with his member. In his distinction of God’s spiritual and worldly ‘regimes’ or ‘kingdoms.’ Luther included marriage within the worldly regime and says that marriage is not a sacrament.”<sup>35</sup> Okay, we say it is.

The Baltimore Catechism: “What are the purposes of marriage? The primary purpose of marriage is that children may be brought into the world and properly trained for God’s kingdom; other purposes are that husband and wife may mutually help and comfort each other and that in holy wedlock they may have a virtuous means of expressing their love.”<sup>36</sup> - And the Baltimore Catechism’s copyright was in 1941.

This is what the Church said, Vatican Council II, 1962-1965: “Marriage to be sure is not instituted solely for procreation; rather, its very nature as an unbreakable compact between persons, and the welfare of the children, both demand that the mutual love of the spouses be embodied in a rightly ordered manner, that it grow and ripen. Therefore, marriage persists as a whole manner and communion of life, and maintains its value and indissolubility, even when despite the often intense desire of the couple, offspring are lacking.”<sup>37</sup>

So Vatican Council did not agree with what the Baltimore Catechism had to say. Baltimore Catechism said you get married to have kids. Vatican Council said it is not

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<sup>35</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, 296.

<sup>36</sup> Francis J. Connell, 316.

<sup>37</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II*, 255.

solely for procreation, it is for this unbreakable bond between two people. That is a different focus now, isn't it?

Let's go back to the Baltimore Catechism which so many people hold in high regard: If marriage then is only for the procreation of children, does that mean that a marriage contracted between two senior citizens is not a valid marriage? (The men are silent.)

You can talk to me....(The men laugh.)

*Under that definition, yes.*

In Vatican Council II, it is valid. Right? I am just trying to push your envelopes a bit here. If we look at marriage solely as that vehicle in which we make other little Catholics what about the couple who can't have children? I will bring up my friends Jim and Peggy. I know Peggy since high school, back in the holy city of Bayonne. After Jim and Peggy got married, several years hence, no children. They went to the doctors, all kinds of tests, and the doctors told them this: 'if you were married to a more potent man and if you were married to a more fertile woman you could have children.' But the two of them together, married to each other, would never be able to have children together. Does that mean their marriage is void?

*No, no, no.*

Vatican Council II:

“This council realizes that certain modern conditions often keep couples from arranging their married lives harmoniously, and that they find themselves in circumstances where at least temporarily, the size of their families should not be increased. As a result, the faithful exercise of love and the full intimacy of their lives is hard to maintain. But where the intimacy of married life is broken off, its faithfulness can sometimes be imperiled and its quality of fruitfulness ruined, for

then the upbringing of the children and the courage to accept new ones are both endangered.”<sup>38</sup>

Once again, making love is renewal of the covenant. Sex is very important. And the Church teaches that.

Marriage paperwork. Any of you guys, years ago, marry a non-Catholic? What happened when you went to the church to get married? Did you have to sign something? Did she have to sign something? What? Okay. She had to sign - the non-Catholic party had to sign that he or she would raise the children in the Catholic Church. Period. That is the way the marriage paperwork used to be. It is not that way now and it has not been that way for the almost thirty-five years that I have been ordained a priest.

When one spouse is not Catholic, the Catholic party *may* sign, but the non-Catholic party is not asked to sign anything regarding the religion of the children. The Catholic party doesn't have to sign anything - he or she *may* sign - because the church says that what is most important in the marriage is not that little Catholics are born, but that the husband and the wife have a fulfilling relationship. And if the religion of the children is going to cause a rift or any kind of a challenge or difficulty in the marriage relationship, the Church says: Catholic party back off. Don't make the religion of the children drive a wedge between you and your spouse, because Jesus calls every person to be faithful, and we have to be faithful to each other in that covenant relationship.

Jesus calls us no matter who we are or how we are to walk in his footsteps. And that is what he calls married couples to do. When we talk about walking in Christ's

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<sup>38</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II*, 255.

footsteps, all too often, all we think about is the cross. Taking up the cross and walking, and that is true. In marriage you have burdens, you have trials, you have difficulties, you have deaths, and that is the cross. But marriage is also filled with resurrection, isn't it gentlemen? Joys and successes. Good times. Births. And so these images of Jesus that we have, must be images that permeate our marriages.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life.”<sup>39</sup>

It is no news bulletin for me to say to you that life is a challenge. Every morning when you wake up you recommit yourself to the challenge of living your life. Marriage is a challenge. I don't have to tell any of you that. Every morning when you wake up, you are called to make a recommitment to that marriage covenant you made how many years ago. It is the same thing I have to do when I get up in the morning. I have got to make a commitment once again to living out the sacrament of Orders. It isn't always easy or the most pleasant all the time. That is the commitment. We make a commitment to life; we make a commitment to living out our sacraments.

Your marriage is a challenge. No question about it. How easy is it to feel like you are always giving and not getting anything in return? How often can the balance of your matrimonial covenant be upset if you say: ‘I am doing all the giving, I need a response, I am not getting any.’ Or perhaps, it is your wife who is saying ‘I am not getting any

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<sup>39</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 414.

response from my husband.’ In matrimony you are called to be the minister. You minister to each other. You give ministry and you receive ministry.

Being married is tough. I don’t have to tell you guys that. Living a marital commitment is tough. People are people and I am very fond of saying, we are complicated individuals, who bring our complicated selves to a complicated relationship with another complicated human being. Marriage cannot be one person living the commitment. It takes two. Somebody said that before. Living every sacrament is tough. Even when we are alone, it is not easy to live our sacraments.

More than 50 percent of marriages contracted in the United States end in divorce. Divorce. Divorce is not an impediment to receiving the sacraments. That is something that I have to say on a regular basis because right away people say, ‘I am divorced I can’t go to the sacraments’ and that isn’t true. Divorce and remarriage outside the Church: that is an impediment to receiving the sacraments. But I have to tell you that I personally temper that. I know what the rule of the Church is, but I also approach things from a different vantage point sometimes.

Trevor Mild from the parish, one of our seniors in high school, asked me a couple of weeks ago, what I wanted to see in the new Pope. And I said, “the answer I am going to give you, you are not going to understand.” He said, “Try me.” I said: “I want the new Pope to eliminate the Marriage Tribunal.” He said, “the what?” It is the office of every diocese that handles annulments. And the Episcopalian Church, something that I wish we would do, leaves annulments in the hands of the local pastor. Rather than go through this long, drawn out process, which isn’t always as feeling as I think it should be. I think they should just leave it in the hands of the local pastor. Because we are talking about

annulments, we are talking about whether or not it was a sacramental union. It has nothing at all to do with civil annulments, as we understand them. I will talk more about that later. Marriages are in a lot of trouble these days.

This is what the Catholic Catechism says: “The remarriage of persons divorced from a living, lawful spouse contravenes the plan and law of God as taught by Christ. They are not separated from the Church, but they cannot receive Eucharistic Communion. They will lead Christian lives especially by educating their children in the faith.”<sup>40</sup>

That is the rule. Now how do we live this out? There is a woman in the parish, comes to Mass every single Sunday, and when she got married to her husband, they got married outside the Church. As the years have gone on, she wants to get that marriage rectified in the Church. She wants a sacramental union in the Church. He refuses to do anything to get an annulment. Should she be denied receiving the Eucharist? She got married outside the Church because he had been married before. And that wasn't a concern of hers at the time. Now, that she has gotten older, it is a concern of hers. She wants to have her marriage sacramental in the Church. He refuses to do anything about getting an annulment. He doesn't believe in the process. Should she be denied going to Communion? So here is the rule and then there has to be the practice, at least according to *this* priest, there has to be pastoral practice.

I watched another woman in our parish. And I finally said to her one day before Mass began, I said, ‘I see that you always leave Mass right before the beginning of Communion. Would you tell me why you do that?’ She said, ‘I come to Mass every Sunday and it just breaks my heart when everybody goes up the aisle for Communion and

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<sup>40</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 415.

I can't.' I said, 'why can't you?' She said, 'I was married before and I don't have an annulment. I am married again and I baptized my kids and I bring them to Church every Sunday, but I just can't bear to see people going to Communion.' I said, 'how about we get together and we will talk about an annulment, but in the mean time let me ask you a question: If you walked up to Jesus at the Last Supper, would he ask for your credentials or would he give you a piece of bread to eat?' She burst out crying and said, 'He would give me a piece of bread to eat.' I said, 'I believe that too. So please stop leaving Church at the beginning of Communion. Come to Eucharist, and if I have to answer for that when I get to the Kingdom, I will answer for it. In the meantime let's think about that annulment and you celebrate in faith.' Is it against the rule? Well, I guess it is.

The Eastern Church says this: They maintain the indissolubility of marriage, but in dealing with people whose marriages have been broken, they follow the principle of compassion, which is a flexible interpretation of canons, the canons of faith. And compassion takes precedence over the principle of dogma.

I like that. I had a conversation with my neighbor pastor whom I hold in tremendous high regard, Bishop John Flesey, over at Most Blessed Sacrament in Franklin Lakes. I love John Flesey. John Flesey had this observation a couple of years ago. He said: 'a bad marriage is the only sin that a church doesn't forgive.' Think about that.

Back to the Catholic Catechism of the Catholic Church: "the remarriage of persons divorced from a living, lawful spouse contravenes the plan and law of God as taught by Christ." When I read that before, I put my finger up when it said lawful. Lawful. What is that word? Can't that word be interpreted in a whole variety of ways? What is lawful?

My German theologian friend says: “Jesus speaking in Mark is combined with Genesis where the origin and indissolubility of marriage are attributed to God. Jesus did not intend thereby to appear as a new lawgiver, especially since, in view of the chance that the reign of God would be realized in the near future, the question of marriage would be relativized in any case.”<sup>41</sup>

Remember when Jesus quoted Moses about a bill of divorce? That it was permissible according to Moses? There is some distinction between the Jews and the Christians of the first century. So divorce, not divorce. But what else? “Since God intends the enduring unity of the partners, any separation is against the divine will; therefore there should be no legal provisions for it. This stance would have to have a positive effect on the position of women.”<sup>42</sup>

Jesus spoke against divorce, go Jesus! Because he was speaking out in favor of the woman. What happened to the woman when there was a divorce? There was no one to take care of her. We can’t speculate, but would Jesus speak about marriage today the same way he did twenty-one centuries ago? We have no way of knowing, but it is a question that can get asked.

Marriage. On the one hand marriage is more than sex, isn’t it? But on the other hand, if we go back to what Scripture says about the two becoming one, this is the question I ask young people: “with exactly how many different people do you plan to be one?” Is sex merely a biological function or a drive? There are those who used to say that Original Sin was sex. Saint Augustine presumed that Adam and Eve were sexually active before the Fall, so that marital acts in themselves are good - that sounds old fashioned -

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<sup>41</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, 288.

<sup>42</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, 288.



should it sound old fashioned? We have that old fashioned term of “the marriage act.” And that is my question: should it sound old fashioned? Society seems to have unbridled sex. Should we be more old fashioned about it? I don’t know. That is why I am throwing all this out for you to think about as we think about marriage and continue to talk about it.

Needless to say there are people who get married for all the wrong reasons, but I don’t know anyone that gets married with the idea of getting divorced. So, in that light, we have ecclesiastical annulments. That declares that the marriage wasn’t sacramental. It doesn’t say the marriage didn’t take place, it doesn’t say the children were illegitimate because they weren’t married, it doesn’t say any of that. All it does is say it wasn’t sacramental. That is a long process to say it wasn’t sacramental. Again I wish the Pope would get rid of the tribunal so we could do it differently.

I write with a fountain pen. Some people say it is a dying art and in the twenty-first century world in which we live, people write with ballpoint pens, in what I like to call this plastic age. And when it runs dry, we throw it out. The image I want to put before you gentlemen is that marriage is like a pen. Is it a Bic that gets thrown away when it goes dry, or is it a fountain pen? Is it an investment worth keeping that gets replenished when that cartridge empties out and goes dry? All I have to do is go back to the office and fill this up and it is working again. In our modern culture is marriage a dying art?

I want to propose to you that Jesus is the cartridge in the fountain pen of matrimony, that his love nourishes the couple individually, collectively and through one another. The couple encounters Jesus every day through each other. Jesus strengthens you gentlemen to live the reality of marriage. As much as we go around saying, who wears

the pants in the family, I want to suggest to you that Jesus wears the pants in the family. That he is the leader. That it is not a partnership between two people, that it is a corporation where Jesus is the CFO - Chief Fidelity Officer and the CEO - Chief Encouraging Office.

And then in turn, if Jesus ministers to you gentlemen as a married couple, so you, in turn, are Jesus to each other and Jesus to your children and Jesus to your grandchildren. How many times as a husband, as a father, as a grandfather, have you been the reconciling Jesus who forgives and forgets? How many times as a husband, as a father, as a grandfather have you been the healing Jesus who soothes minds and bandages cuts? How many times as husbands, as fathers, as grandfathers have you been the consoling Jesus who dries tears and encourages the crestfallen? I don't know how many of you saw the magnificent film "The Passion of the Christ." There is a scene of Mary approaching Jesus on the road to Calvary and they cut the film just as he falls and they have a flashback to when little Jesus is running up a hill and he falls down and starts to cry and Mary goes and picks him up and comforts him. That is you.

Think of your imperfect parents who weren't all that you wanted them to be and think of the many times that they were Jesus for you and the many times that they were Jesus to each other. Think and recognize the many times that you have been Jesus for your wife, for your children, for your grandchildren. That's the grace of the sacrament of Matrimony. The fact that Jesus gives you the grace to become more like him so that your eternal love for your wife and your wife's love for you and the love you have for your children and your grandchildren make that wonderful, perfect circle of love that can be symbolized in that ring that you wear on the fourth finger of your left hands. That circle,

which is symbolized in your wedding ring, is a sure and certain sign of God's eternal love for us. It has no beginning and it has no end. A love which, coming from God, is absolutely indissoluble, just as marriage, in its ideal, is absolutely indissoluble.

Let's spend a couple of minutes on the hottest topic regarding marriage in the world today. And as I try to do, I try to present various angles without ever telling you what to think, just always encouraging you to think.

A couple of Labor Days ago, I was at friends of mine's house in West Orange and there was a couple there, Bill and Tom by name. I knew Bill since my first parish assignment as a priest and Tom was a guy that he met in New York any number of years ago. And this whole thing of getting married was their topic of conversation. And I became the symbol of the Catholic Church standing in their way. And it was a position I didn't want to be in and after I put up with it for a little while I said, 'I didn't come here to be made to feel uncomfortable, so I am leaving.' I got my motorcycle helmet and I got on my bike and I rode away.

But one of the things that Bill said in his impassioned explanation and speech, he said: "they are denying us our civil rights." If his civil rights are being denied, and he is not allowed to get married, then the Church is denying me my civil rights too. Right? I am not allowed to get married. So that is my question. Is marriage a right? It's a gift, it is not a right. I don't know. You don't even have to answer. Does somebody have the right to get married? If it is a civil right then it can happen civilly, correct?

Gay marriage - whatever we call it - we hear gay marriage, we hear marriage equality. Those both intimate something different. Gay marriage. Is it marriage the way we have always understood it? Well, no, but just to add fuel to the fire, what about

marriage today is the way we have always understood it? It is a commitment to each other. But is marriage in the twenty-first century the same way it was fifty years ago? Is there such a thing as a wedding night anymore? It is the first night you are together after you are married, no question about that, but is the whole notion of a wedding night the same way today as it was fifty years ago. Rarely. Until Sarah Zimmerman and Jim McGinnis had their first wedding appointment with me, every single one of the couples that I have been dealing with in marriage preparation for the last couple of years have been living together: without exception.

One of my goddaughters was raised by a single mom. She was adopted out of India and my friend Judy made a point of making her daughter's fiancée ask her for my goddaughter Thérèse's hand in marriage. And you know what I said to Judy? "Did he ask your permission when he did a lot more than hold her hand for the first time?" You are asking for her hand in marriage, let's be realistic. What are you saying about marriage? I look at it this way these days: marriage is like a smorgasbord, brides and grooms choose what they want for their marriage and for their wedding day especially. 'Oh, he can't see me on my wedding day. He can't see me before I walk down the aisle. He can't see me until the doors open. Where can I hide because there are glass doors here in the church and he can't see me.' Of course you can sleep together the night before and he sees plenty of you, but on the wedding day, 'you can't see me.' Huh? Huh? I keep thinking I will write a letter to the editor of the Suburban News and say "when you are reporting on marriages, you have to stop saying 'given in marriage by her father.'" That is a term I excised from my vocabulary many years ago, principally because she is not a piece of cattle being given away. That's one thing. But even if you want to use the term 'given in

marriage,' haven't the groom and the bride given themselves away a long, long time ago?  
It doesn't have to be walking down the aisle.

*That's really not true, what you're saying right now.*

I am just trying to show different ways that we look at marriage today. Who knows where the values went? Who knows?

So when we are talking about marriage, what is it we are saying? When we are talking about gay marriage, we are talking about two people of the same gender who cannot procreate. Is that an impediment to being married?

*Yes, because of your definition.*

Oh no, please understand. When I read that, that was from the Baltimore Catechism copyright 1941. And I followed that by saying that Vatican II in the 60s said that that is not the sole purpose for getting married. It is not the primary reason.

*In the 80s we used to do Pre-Cana and one of the things we told the couples that having children was the reason to get married and that Rhythm was the only method they could use.*

In the 80s? What parish were you in? Different parishes look at things in different ways. Rhythm in the 80s? By that time we were NFP, Natural Family Planning. But that is not rhythm that is a different thing. As I said before: dogma versus compassion.

*It's a nice theory but we follow the Pope's teaching and the Catholic Church's teaching.*

But how many follow it?

*But I could go to a different parish and hear something completely different from you're saying here.*

I agree with you because when I say that I wish that the Holy Father would get rid of the Marriage Tribunal and leave it in the hands of the pastors and Linda Jones in our parish said to me, 'well, then it is going to be different when you go from one parish to another.' Well, it is different when you go from one diocesan tribunal to another diocesan tribunal.

*And that makes it confusing, not right.*

It is not across the board, this is not an easy topic. This is not black and white by any stretch of the imagination.

*You're throwing out a lot of things. You're making us think. You've asked if marriage is a right versus a privilege. And so the challenge I ask myself as a Catholic person, is, is it okay for the Catholic Church to offer an opportunity for a man and a woman to marry, but not to a couple of the same sex. How can you define that as not being discriminatory, I don't want to discriminate. That is a challenge to all of us here. I don't want to discriminate.*

That is when you are talking about marriage equality. There are different ways of looking at the same thing. Cecil.

*If two people of the same sex love each other, you have to answer that question for yourself. If God is love, God is in their love too.*

Is it marriage in the way that we understood it? But then again marriage isn't the way we understood it then either.

*It is a matter of conscience. What can you follow and what can you not follow?*

*But when the Pope says it's wrong, it's wrong.*

*But you have to form a conscience. I understood in the Baltimore Catechism that conscience is absolute. You had to form a correct conscience based on your faith.*

Baltimore Catechism was fun. It was black and white. It was it was not. That was an easy time.

*But what the Pope said, is that infallible?*

The Holy Father, all of them since the doctrine of infallibility came in, in Vatican Council I - it has been invoked three times. So no, it is not infallible.

If you go into gay marriage, the bible says male and female, right? I cannot perform a marriage without a license. I am a valid witness for the state but I cannot witness a marriage without a marriage license.

*But what if a gay couple comes in with a marriage license?*

Not in the Sate of New Jersey they're not. That is all going to the Supreme Court now. Should we have different laws about marriage from state to state? The Bible doesn't have much to say that supports, especially in the Old Testament, the traditional view of marriage. Abraham, our father in faith, was married to Sarah and had a kid with a slave, Hagar, right? And then Jacob, his grandson got married to two women Leah and Rachel and also had children with their two maidservants. So he had kids with four. So that the twelve tribes of Israel, who we hold up as an example, a couple of them are full brothers to each other but a lot of them are half brothers to each other because the twelve tribes came from four different mothers. King David had many many wives and concubines and so did Solomon. And people say, well that was a different time then. Well, it is a different time today too. I am not giving you any answers, I am just throwing it out in some kind of cohesive way I hope. I want everybody to think.

As I said the night we were doing celibacy, Ed Lawn and I were talking about this at the end of the thing about those who say that gays are trying to destroy marriage. I said, 'well heterosexual people have done a good job of it also.' 'Gays are making a mockery of marriage.' I think Hollywood has been making a mockery of marriage for generations. How many emotional Bridezillas are walking in their footsteps?

Then there is the other phenomenon. So many couples are choosing not to get married today. Who wants to get married?

*Gays.*

Right, so heterosexual couples are moving away from the tradition of getting married and gay people want in, what so many others don't want a part of anymore.

*Do you think it's their way of getting validation?*

I think so. I want to be like everybody else. About ten years ago, eight years ago, Time Magazine had an essay and it was written by a gay guy who spoke about when marriage was important to him. I remember standing in the kitchen at 11 Loyola Place reading this, and I understood exactly what he was saying, except that I was reading it as a celibate male who is not permitted to get married. He was talking about all of his friends going through all these typical rites of passage that were denied him. And I am reading this thinking: I had that experience. All my friends going through this rite of passage and I took a very different road in life and I wasn't part of all these traditions. I got to be a Best Man once in my life, I was a priest already. And I was like a little kid in a China shop, I had a better time than the groom did. I was so excited. I was in a wedding party. I felt so normal. I was sitting at the head table at the wedding reception and I felt so normal, because it was something that was denied me. And so when I read this essay that



was written by this guy I said, I know what you are saying. From a very different vantage point but I understood what he was saying and so what can I say, we live in interesting times.

*You're not suffering like the rest of us.*

*If you could get married tomorrow, would you?*

No, I'm too old. We discussed that at our last Faith Friday. How would people react to their local parish priest dating? And would I be allowed to date women in the parish or would I have to date outside the parish?

Any questions comments observations difficulties and dilemmas. I hope I have not given you one answer and not one opinion from me and that you are scratching your head...And you know, I wish it weren't Lent, so that I could have a drink.

*I'd just like to take a few seconds out of this to thank Father Tom, not only for tonight, but all the Lenten Services of the Faith Fridays. It's been a great thing for the Knights. I hope it continues. And anyone who is here tonight who has not been part of this, come. Come back, be part of the Council again.*

**Appendix J**  
**Good Friday Invitation**

**Rev. Thomas Paul Lipnicki**  
Chaplain, Knights of Columbus  
Ramapo Valley Council #5846  
25 Purdue Avenue  
Oakland, New Jersey 07436  
[201-337-7596/left.handed829@gmail.com](mailto:201-337-7596/left.handed829@gmail.com)

March 21, 2013

Dear Brother Knight,

This past Tuesday evening, March 19<sup>th</sup>, about fifty of us gathered to celebrate the *Feast of Saint Joseph*. We began with Mass at 6:00 o'clock and then had cocktails and dinner at our Council Hall. The homily at Mass addressed **The Role of Men in the Church** and at the end of dinner (prior to dessert and coffee) we discussed **Marriage**. It was a lively and interactive discussion.

I invite you to join with your brother Knights for the last of our *Lenten Series* on Good Friday evening, March 29<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 in the Church *House* of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. This Knights-only gathering will be different from the Solemn Services of the Church that will have been observed at 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon. The homily/teaching/discussion at our Prayer Service will consider **Eternal Life**, the gift won for us by Jesus through his suffering and death on Good Friday. It is a topic that many of the Knights of Columbus said was of interest to them when they completed the questionnaire they received from me in January.

Our Lenten Series has been both formational and informative. I have greatly enjoyed presenting it and look forward to future teachings based on the suggestions and questions noted on the evaluations that have concluded every presentation.

Plan to spend some prayerful, meditative time with your brother Knights on the most solemn and somber night of the year: Good Friday. As always, I have enclosed a response postcard to confirm your attendance. I look forward to seeing you, my brother Knight, on the evening of Good Friday.

Sincerely,

Rev. Thomas Paul Lipnicki

P.S. Our brother Knight Lou Renshaw is one of the Speakers at *Seven Last Words* at Noon on Good Friday. It is always a very moving Service and time well spent. Come and listen to Lou's reflection on "It is finished." His Talk is very moving and I know he will appreciate the support of our Council.

## Appendix K

### Eternal Life Presentation

Let us pray: Oh God, who by the Passion of Christ, Your Son, our Lord, abolished the death inherited from ancient sin: may every succeeding generation grant that just as being conformed to Him we are born by the law of nature the image of the man on earth so that by the sanctification of grace we may bear the image of the man... through our Lord Jesus Christ Your Son who lives and reigns with you and the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

So the topic of our last Lenten presentation in our series is Eternal Life. And once again I am a little bit surprised that there was a lot of interest in talking about Eternal Life. And I guess I was surprised because I think that we just take this notion for granted. So before I start, as I have done every other time: what do you hope I am going to talk about? What do you hope I am going to cover? What kind of questions do you have in your minds?

*How do you get there?*

Okay, I think I am going to cover that.

*When do you get there?*

Okay, we are going to talk about that too.

*How do you get to heaven and not one of the other options?*

Okay, we are going to cover that too. Okay. When I was gathering my notes and getting all this together I was wondering how much I should do about that. You are referring to the resurrection of the dead, the bodily resurrection of the dead that we talk

about in the Nicene Creed. I won't spend a lot of time on that because I think we are limited but hopefully I will make some kind of comment.

*Are we going to be so caught up in seeing God that our other relationships won't matter?*

*Are we going to have other relationships?*

There is the Gospel passage, the Sadducees, those who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead posed this question to Jesus to test him and they are relying on the old Mosaic law that said if you are married to your wife and you die and your wife is childless then your next brother has the obligation to marry her, to have a child with her, and that first child is not technically yours but his. Then there is this woman, she is married to this guy, he died childless, married the brother, he also died childless. She ends up marrying all seven brothers and ended up being childless and when she goes to the kingdom whose wife is she going to be? Of course they don't give her much of a choice in this matter. She goes from one creepy guy to the next. Romeo.

*What about people who die and then come back?*

I have never met anybody who had a near death experience or a death experience as some used to claim. It seemed to be much more popular back in the seventies. I remember when I was in the seminary, I didn't take this particular class, but the seminary professor had somebody in who had an after death experience. And he came in and talked to the guys about his experience. It is all very interesting because they are all very much the same, going to the light and being sent back. Isn't there a new book out; some little kid? I looked very little at it, because it is not part of my faith experience and my faith commitment, not that I don't believe in Eternal Life, don't get me wrong.

From the Gospel of Luke:

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”<sup>43</sup>

Kingdom. Paradise. Where is it? What is it like? Words we flip around very easily.

From Mark’s Gospel:

“He also said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’”<sup>44</sup>

Oh.

From Matthew’s Gospel:

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock. He did the same. And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to

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<sup>43</sup> Luke 23: 39 – 43 (NAB).

<sup>44</sup> Mark 4: 30 – 32.

you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last.<sup>45</sup>

So my heaven is not going to be any better or any different from yours? But does everybody get there?

Also from Matthew's Gospel:

Jesus said to his disciples: When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right: 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me. 'Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.<sup>46</sup>

So here we have a depiction of Heaven and Hell - the righteous go to Heaven and the sinners go to Hell. Eternal Punishment - Hell, Eternal Reward - Heaven. Are these the only two options? It's not a trick question. Come on, you Catholic men: Purgatory.

Limbo. Are these our four options? Heaven, Hell, Purgatory and Limbo?

Let's talk about Limbo first. Limbo - Baltimore Catechism: "What becomes of the souls of infants who die without Baptism? The souls of infants who die without Baptism

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew 20: 1 – 16.

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 25: 31 – 46.

are sent to Limbo, where for all eternity they will enjoy natural happiness but not the supernatural happiness of heaven.”<sup>47</sup> That is Baltimore Catechism, copyright 1941.

Copyright 1994. The Catechism of the Catholic Church does not on any one of its pages mention Limbo. Where have we moved in 50 years?

How many of us grew up believing in Limbo? Limbo was invented by Saint Thomas Aquinas to settle a theological dilemma. On the one hand there is Saint Augustine. And Saint Augustine always said that no one is condemned or punished for sin of which the individual person is not personally culpable. So we can't be condemned for somebody else's sin. On the other side of things, the Church preached the necessity of Baptism. If you are not baptized, you cannot go to heaven. On the one hand if you are not baptized, you cannot go to heaven but you can't be punished for a sin that you didn't do yourself so if you didn't get sent for Baptism you are not guilty but - the Church got itself into this dilemma. What are we going to do? You can't punish babies for not being baptized yet we can't send them to heaven because they weren't baptized. So what are we going to do? He made up this theological concept of a place called Limbo. And that's what it was, and we believed it. And for many, many years, we were stuck in that particular situation. If you are not baptized you cannot go to heaven but you can't be punished and go to Hell or go to Purgatory, so we are going to send you to Limbo.

The distinction was always made about the age of reason; that until the age of reason, you weren't able to reason that you needed to be baptized. Then when the age of

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<sup>47</sup> Francis J. Connell, 210.

reason hit, like six or seven years old, then you were supposed to know enough to want to get baptized.

*It doesn't seem right.*

Of course it doesn't and that is why it was a dilemma, it doesn't seem right. So many times in our Church's history, we have gotten ourselves backed into a wall because of a particular theological argument, and nowadays I think we are more open to thinking. At least I am always interested in encouraging people to think. I say it about four thousand times every time we have our Genesis Group: Think.

So if we are saying that there is no such place as Limbo because it is a made up theological concept, don't you need to be baptized in order to go to Heaven?

*Isn't there more than just Baptism with water?*

Let's not get into Baptism of desire or Baptism of blood, even though one of my favorite stories of all time comes out of that. I don't know if we have time to talk about Baptism of blood or Baptism of desire.

*We were taught that only Catholics – only Christians can go to heaven. What about good Jews? Can't they go to heaven?*

Elijah was taken by a fiery chariot up to heaven and he was one of the Hebrew prophets and so therefore he was a Jew who was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. Once again, we got ourselves bollixed up with all kinds of stuff.

Do you think you need to be baptized in order to get to Heaven? Maybe some of you think no, maybe some of you think yes.

Vatican II:

In explicit terms, Jesus Himself affirmed the necessity of faith and Baptism: (Mark 16: 16 – 'The one who is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not



believe will be condemned.’ (Mark 16: 16) And thereby affirmed also the necessity of the Church, for through Baptism as through a door people enter the Church. Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by God through Jesus Christ, would refuse to enter her or to remain in her could not be saved.<sup>48</sup>

So you’ve got to be baptized in order to get to heaven, that is what that says, right?

*It says knowingly.*

Knowingly. So if you know you are supposed to get baptized and you don’t - then there’s a problem?

This is also from Vatican II: “Therefore, though God in ways known to Himself, can lead those inculpably ignorant of the Gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please Him.”<sup>49</sup>

Vatican II also speaks about the anonymous Christian; the person who is not a Christian, who does Christian things; the person who lives a good life. So we need to keep that in mind: on the one hand we talk about the importance and necessity of Baptism but on the other side we are saying you don’t have to be baptized, really. If you know you are supposed to be baptized, then you should. But if you are not...

So knowing the efficacy of Baptism, but refraining from it, then we’re going to say there is no salvation. But not knowing and living a good life, that’s the anonymous Christian that Vatican II talks about, and that person is brought to salvation. So therefore Limbo is put to rest. We put it to rest in our minds but the word and the concept is going to stay with people until there aren’t people anymore. For our purposes, there is no such

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<sup>48</sup> The Documents of Vatican II, 32.

<sup>49</sup> The Documents of Vatican II, 593.

thing. The Church has explained that away and we don't think about Limbo anymore. That is why it didn't make it into the Catholic Catechism.

That would begin to go into what John referred to before about the Baltimore Catechism and the Baptism of water, Baptism of blood and Baptism of desire. Baptism of blood: you get your head bludgeoned in by the heathens in the town next door because you profess your faith in Christ and even though you weren't baptized. You died a martyr and we refer to it as Baptism of blood. Then there was Baptism of desire. The desire to get baptized but never getting to it and being baptized by that way.

The story that I wasn't going to tell: I will try to do it as quickly as possible because it fits right in. I was teaching Religious Education teachers in the Archdiocese of Newark, and we were on this specific topic of Limbo and the necessity of Baptism. There was this one guy who was really very belligerent and he got more belligerent as the night went on, over the fact that if you are not baptized there is no way that you go to Heaven. It doesn't make any difference: adult, baby, if you are not baptized you don't go to Heaven.

There was a woman sitting in the back and she was squirming, she was going back and forth and I knew something was going on within her and so I said to her: 'What is happening to you, what is going on?' And she picked up her head, her head was bowed down, and she said, 'I gave birth to a baby and my baby died before he was baptized and there is no way that you are going to tell me that my baby didn't go to Heaven.' This guy turned around and said to her, "Lady, your baby didn't go to Heaven."

And I thought, 'Man do I not want you teaching my kids!' I thought, 'what do I do - what do I do in this situation?' The Gospel says you are going to be brought before

tribunals and don't think beforehand what you are going to say because the Holy Spirit is going to tell you what to say. I opened up my mouth, and this is what came out - I looked at this guy, and said, 'We have talked about Baptism, Baptism with water, right? And what are the other two Baptisms we have from the Baltimore Catechism?' He said "Baptism of blood and Baptism of desire." So okay, I said 'good - I accept that fully. We also said that when parents bring their babies to Baptism whose faith is it that we are celebrating? Are we celebrating the faith of the baby or are we celebrating the faith of the parents that are bringing their baby to Baptism?' He said, 'we are celebrating the faith of the parents.' I said, 'It is not the faith of the baby; it is the faith of the parents? Yes?' And they all nodded their heads including belligerent man.

I said: 'therefore, if we are not celebrating the faith of the baby, we are celebrating the faith of the parents. And if you believe in the Baptism of desire, then doesn't it follow in logical suit, that this mother, who would have brought her baby to Baptism, had she had the opportunity, would have done that, but because she was in the hospital and the baby was so sick and died so quickly, she didn't have the opportunity to do it. Didn't that baby receive Baptism of desire by the sheer will of the mother in the hospital?' I thought I was the most brilliant person on the face of the planet at that particular moment. Belligerent man said, "Father that is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard in my life." But the mother in the back was really happy. She nodded her head and she had a big smile on her face.

It is really a very difficult thing; to back ourselves into this wall and say if you are not baptized you are not getting there. It is arrogance on the part of the Catholic Church and it is good that we don't embrace that anymore.

Next topic, do you pray for the dead? Do you pray for your dead even though you think they are in Heaven?

The question still stands. Do I believe my mom is in Heaven? Absolutely. Do I pray for her every morning and every night and at every Mass? Absolutely I do, no question about it, I do. Yeah, yeah. My brother died April 1, 1984. It is going to be 29 years this coming Monday. Do I still pray for my brother? Every day. Do I think he went to Heaven? Absolutely. But do I still pray for him? Yeah, yeah.

After I read Matthew's Gospel about the sheep and the goats - eternal life, eternal punishment - Heaven and Hell.

*What qualifies you to be a sinner, a sheep or a goat? How much do you have to sin to be a sheep or a goat?*

Maybe I have this farther down in my notes here. What qualifies you as being a sheep or a goat? I think any time we listen to any of the Gospel narratives or any of the parables, I think that at some time or another each one of us has played every single one of the roles. It is as simple as that. One of the things that I will say about sin is that, unless it is something particularly heinous, I do not believe that sin is an individual action. I think it is a habit, I think it is a way of life. So habitually do you ... once in a while do you falter? Yes, but what is the habit?

*What makes it a habit and not just an individual action?*

I don't know. As we go on, we are going to bring more of this stuff out. You listen to me on a regular basis; I am not somebody who has a lot of answers. I am one who is really happy to pose a lot of questions, and that is where I am, as far as this is concerned.

We have Heaven and Hell placed before us, the sheep and the goats - what about the Catholic tradition of Purgatory? Protestant traditions would look at Saint Paul and talk about justification by faith alone, justification by faith and that is it. Claim Jesus as Savior and then do what you want? Protestants have a tendency to follow Saint Paul. Catholics have a tendency more to follow Saint James. Not that we as Catholics don't listen to Paul, we do. James is the one who speaks of works that underlie faith - not just the faith to say what you believe but how do you put that belief into practice in your life?

Heaven - Hell. One of our constant difficulties is the balancing of the attributes we put to God. Does a just God send people to Hell?

*Yes.*

So a just God sends people to Hell. Okay. Does a merciful God send people to Hell?

*Yes*

Elucidate.

*Does a just judge send people away, send people to jail?*

Sometimes the judge is bound by what the law says and that is why the California prisons are full of guys, because they really haven't done stuff that requires their being incarcerated but because of California law they have to be incarcerated because legislators have decided that second strike and you are in for five years. Do we really need to do that? Can mercy play out?

*A merciful God forgives.*

One of the things we have also got ourselves caught up in is all the superlatives we put on God. Sometimes those superlatives can seem to be in contradiction with each other. The two that I chose tonight: All Merciful and All Just. What is “Just” versus what is “Merciful.”

*Justice tempered by mercy.*

*There'd be no way anyone could ever get to heaven if God wasn't merciful.*

*Is God a punishing God or a forgiving God?*

Scripture is full of images of an angry God who in the same breath shows clemency. We have God who punishes Cain and then protects him. We have God who throws Adam and Eve out of the Garden, and then gives them clothing to wear, gives them a place to live. He sends a flood but then saves Noah and his wife and their three sons and their three wives. He sends poisonous snakes on the people as they are crossing the desert and then He gives them an antidote to the poison. Does God punish or does God forgive?

*He forgives.*

If God punishes and forgives, where did we get the notion - I am not saying you shouldn't believe in it - where do we get our pretty Catholic notion of Purgatory? It is from Scripture and here it is - and so the next time that somebody walks up to you and says you Catholic guys don't read Scripture, just think of all the Scripture you have heard just tonight. You guys know Scripture. Make sure you correct them.

On the next day, as had now become necessary, Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kindred in the sepulchers of their ancestors. Then under the tunic of each one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. Ad it became clear to all that this was the reason these men had fallen. So they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous judge, who reveals the things

that are hidden; and they turned to supplication, praying that the sin that had been committed might be wholly blotted out. The noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened as the result of the sin of those who had fallen. He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.<sup>50</sup>

That is our Scriptural basis of praying for the dead. The Baltimore Catechism talks about Purgatory, but doesn't define it. I always envisioned Purgatory as Hell, except you are able to get out of it. That was my notion and I have been told that that is not correct.

Baltimore Catechism:

*“Who are punished in purgatory? Those are punished for a time in purgatory who die in the state of grace but are guilty of venial sin, or have not fully satisfied for the temporal punishment due to their sins.*

*Do we know what souls are in purgatory or how long they have to remain there? We do not know what souls are in purgatory or how long they have to remain there; hence, we continue to pray for all persons who have died after reaching the use of reason, except those whom the Church has declared saints.”<sup>51</sup>*

The Catholic Catechism of the Church, this is what it says – remember it much more contemporary than Baltimore Catechism:

“All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name

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<sup>50</sup> 2 Maccabees 12: 39 – 45.

<sup>51</sup> Francis J. Connell, 113.

*Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned.”

Okay, my image is not an acceptable one!!

“The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire.”<sup>52</sup> You heard that as well as Maccabees which is also cited.

From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice” - that’s what you do when you come to the parish office to get Mass cards - “so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead.”<sup>53</sup>

So Purgatory is a teaching of the Church. Does it reflect a conflict in God? Loving and punishing?

*A father sometimes punishes his children.*

Most of you guys are dads. Do you love your kids? More than words can tell. I can’t even begin to imagine how much you love your kids. It’s one of the things I was denied in life; I don’t have that. Have you ever punished your kid? But you love your kid? Tell me about it, dad. Trying to set them straight? Okay, so you send your kid to his room, no dessert. That was big with my sister when her kids were growing up. Standing in the corner; that was a big thing she used to do. It is a temporary punishment, it is not Hell; it is not forever. It is temporary. If you punished your kid it didn’t mean you hated

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<sup>52</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church 268 – 269.

<sup>53</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 269.



your kid or loved him any less. I used to hear things like this hurts me more than it hurts you. I always doubted that.

I asked several times already about the conflict of God: Merciful God - Just God, Loving God - Punishing God. I always take it from the opposite vantage point - I am somebody who is always willing to let God off the hook. Always. I let God off the hook.

I don't know if this still happens today but back in my day and earlier than my day, it was oftentimes a tradition that when a guy was being ordained a priest, his mother's wedding band went in the bottom of the chalice. If there were diamonds on the wedding band, they got imbedded in the son's chalice. I never brought this up in conversation with my mother because I knew how much she liked her diamond ring and I didn't want her diamond ring for my chalice. I didn't want it.

There were some people in my parish where I spent my year as a deacon, the year prior to being ordained a priest, and one Sunday after Mass I was having breakfast with them and they said: 'You are getting ordained, you are going to be ordering the chalice, right?' I said 'yeah.' They said, 'We heard about this tradition and Janet and I are going to be breaking up some jewelry and having it remade and we would like you to have a diamond. Would you put our diamond in your chalice?' I said, 'sure.' And I called my brother up and I said, 'Jack these people are going to give me a diamond to put in my chalice! I can't believe that I am worth a diamond.' And my big brother, always saying the right thing to little brother, said 'don't worry Tom you are not.' Oh.

I love that image and I have told this story any number of times before but that is the image that I have with regard to the dead; that through the saving work of Jesus, God offers us a diamond. That diamond we are going to call the Kingdom of God - we are

going to call it the Kingdom of Peace, the Kingdom of Joy and the Kingdom of Love. The mercy of God invites all of us into this Kingdom, and maybe sometimes our own sense of justice tells us 'no', maybe it tells us 'not right now- not the way it is being offered to me.' And to me that is what Purgatory is. To me it is being offered the diamond - being offered the Kingdom and saying, 'you know what, I don't deserve that diamond. I don't deserve it. I am being offered the very best, but I am not going to accept it. At least not right now.' That is our prayer. That, to me, is the prayer that we offer for those who have died.

To me that is my prayer for the dead - for them to understand the diamond that God is offering to them *carte blanche* - as I said, to me. That is my particular notion. We pray for our beloved dead, that they change their mind and recognize that not only did they get the diamond but they absolutely deserve it. That's my way of looking at it. *We don't earn it, that's what mercy is all about. Our image of God is based upon ourselves.*

We are being offered something we don't deserve. Lord, I am not worthy. I am not worthy of the diamond that you are giving me.

*I can see for myself the many times I've been patient but then there are times when I'm not. Am I patient or not patient. Am I condemned for the one time I was not patient?*

That's image that we have had: one wrong word in a spelling bee, sixty-five years of living a great life and sinning and doing something obviously bad at the very end.

Does that eliminate the first 65 years? Two destinations down, two to go.

*Do people believe that everyone goes to purgatory?*

I think some people do. I don't think everybody does. I think of my mother went from lying on her deathbed over in the rectory and my sitting on the bed and holding my mother as she died. I think that when she breathed her last in my arms, she took her next breath in the arms of God. She did not pass Go, she did not collect two hundred dollars, she was there. That is what I think.

I was at the casket of my brother and my sister and I were standing together and she said, 'What do you think - do you think he is alright?' I said, 'I think he is alright. Let's not have this debate standing in front of his casket.'

Limbo. Purgatory. Hell. A lot of people don't believe in Hell. Do you believe in Hell? Back to God and all the superlatives: God is all-loving and God is all-merciful and God is all-just. So with an all-merciful and an all-loving God, everybody goes to Heaven right?

*It depends upon the person.*

I condemn myself to Hell. So if I am going to die and I am going to be forgiven, I can live as lascivious a life as I want. No? But God is merciful and God is going to forgive me. Does an All Just God welcome everybody to Heaven? Let's go back to Don Burns' question. And my sister has a resounding answer to your question. Did Adolph Hitler go to Heaven?

*If we believe that we're forgiven of our sins, then yes.*

*The odds are against it, but I guess it's possible.*

*But why live a good life if we're all going to get the same reward?*

*Do you think Hitler went to heaven?*

I don't know. Could he have gone to Heaven. I posed this to my sister, we were discussing this a couple of years ago and she became very angry at the notion that God would forgive Adolph Hitler. Absolutely Hitler went to Hell – absolutely, there is no question. And not just to Hell, Hitler went to a very specific, deep part of Hell that regular Hell would have been too good for him and he had to go to really awful Hell. Well, if Heaven is Heaven - people say. You have a special connection to God because you are a priest. That is really very flattering to say but I am not going to get to a different Heaven than you guys. So that Hell is Hell. So let me ask the question: are there unforgivable sins?

*Yes, whoever denies the Holy Spirit.*

Jesus says whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. Okay, are there any other unforgivable sins?

*Not loving God.*

How about something a little more tangible? When I was sitting at my dining room table assembling this about a week ago, or so - I like to put things in very tangible situations - somebody said before you sound like God's a father, that is a good image for us to have. I tried to think of a sin a father could not forgive his child. And I tried to think of an example and I couldn't think of one, and I thought the best thing was for me to admit that I couldn't think of an example.

Are there any sins that a family member can commit against another family member that could never be forgiven? I am not talking about God the Father, I am talking about personal families - is there anything as a father that you could not forgive your child for? I was trying to find a story that I knew that would reflect this - and precisely

what you are saying - I wanted to come up with a story of somebody who is forgiven by the family for something terrible that he did but the kid just was not able to accept that forgiveness and because of that stayed two and three thousand miles away and will not be in contact with the family even though the family was willing. I couldn't think of one that I actually knew.

*How about abuse?*

When I was trying to think of examples of this and sins that would not be forgivable by one member of the family or the other, I thought it would have to be something really, really heinous. When I was living in Orange in the parish next door at Saint Joe's in West Orange, there was a family that had a lot of functional difficulties - this is a little indelicate, I will try to clean it up. The mother had a particular affection for her older son. The older son basically rebuffed the advances of the mother - until the point that he just stabbed her to death. And then in death, did what she was looking for in life. Horrible, right? Can this kid's brothers and sisters forgive their brother?

Let's not even go for the answer. When I was trying to find something for this, the examples are so extreme, so even when we are talking about Hitler, we are talking about an example that is just so extreme, that most people aren't Hitler. We can look at smaller situations, we can talk about Columbine; we can talk about Sandy Hook Elementary; we can talk about much smaller situations. Even when we are talking about smaller situations, we are talking about something that is really, really extreme and out of the ordinary. That goes into what I was saying before, that I don't think sin is an individual action unless it is something that is really heinous. Those kinds of things are really heinous.

*But killing is a sin. This young man was guilty of killing. Is a soldier guilty of killing when he is sent off to war? The Church blesses soldiers, the Church supports war.*

I think being blessed going into battle is different from the Church condoning war.

*But what about Hitler. He killed, but he was nuts. So he went to heaven.*

I think you are the first person I met who thinks Hitler went to Heaven.

The Baltimore Catechism used to have three strict things about what makes a Mortal Sin a Mortal Sin and what doesn't.

*Did Judas commit a mortal sin when he betrayed Jesus? Did he go to Hell?*

Jesus said it would have been better for him if he hadn't been born. Again, as always, more questions than there are answers. I don't know if Judas was baptized. It doesn't say that he was. It doesn't say that he wasn't. The Bible isn't the life and times of everybody.

Let's do a little bit more because we are determining who is going to Hell and who is getting sent there and is it merciful and is it just and everything else. What do you think Hell is like? Jesus talks about the fires of Gehenna so we have that very strong image of fire.

The Catholic Catechism says: "To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever *by our own free choice*. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called *hell*."

The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend

into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, 'eternal fire.' The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man – *we* - can possess the life and happiness for which he was – *we were* - created and for which he longs – *we long*.<sup>54</sup> (Italics mine and added)

Our own free choice, once again, as John would say, and I am always happy to say that because I am always letting God off the hook. And so we can say that Hitler and Eva Braun chose death and destruction. You can say he was nuts and went to Heaven. We don't know one way or another. We were talking about fundamental option. Are you the same person in life as you are in death? Is it you who are going up to Judgment or is it somebody else? It is going to be you. So therefore, the decisions that you made in this life are going to be reflected in the decisions you make in the life that is to come.

For generations we talked in terms of Venial Sin and Mortal Sin. And there is this really great image from the Baltimore Catechism of the milk bottles filled with milk and the ones that were empty. We got this idea that we were in and out of grace all of the time. And that is what I meant before when I was saying that I don't believe in sin as being an individual action, unless it is really something very heinous. I don't think that we are falling in and out of grace on such a regular basis. I think we are, most of the time of our lives, filled with grace and living with grace.

Years ago I was at a Christmas party and I was talking with Archbishop Gerety. Archbishop Gerety, for years, had had General Absolution ceremonies in the parishes. As soon as McCarrick came in they stopped. This really bugged the living daylights out of Gerety; he hated that McCarrick stopped it. Even with General Absolution there used to be this notion that if you are guilty of serious sin, you still needed to go to Confession.

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<sup>54</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 269 – 270.

That this only took care of the milder, venial type sins. Gerety said to me, I will spare you my imitation of Gerety, he said to me, 'Tom - Mortal Sin. How many people do you think that are in your Church on any regular basis are guilty of Mortal Sin? Mortal - sin unto the death - that is what Mortal Sin is. How many people do you think go to Church on Sundays who are guilty of Mortal Sin.' I kind of knew where he was going with this, so I said, 'I would think very few.' And he said, 'I would say probably no one.' Okay. I love Gerety; he is my man. Gerety. Mortal Sin. .

We all have stuff that we would like to get forgiven for. First and foremost we would like to forgive ourselves for some of this stuff, stuff that we just can't take back. We look back at some of the situations in our lives and say, 'I wish I could just live that day over again. I wish I could have done something a little bit different from the way that I did it.' Those can be our sins, but are there other sins that are unforgivable in that process I don't think so.

There seems to be a real permanence to Hell. Jesus refers to that in the parable about Abraham holding the poor bleeding Lazarus in his arms and the rich man dressed in purple on the other side, and there is no passing from one side to the other. So if you are going to Hell, you are there to stay and you ain't getting out. At least that's what Scripture says. That's what Jesus says and that is what we believe about Hell.

We have talked about all these bad places, what about the good place, what about Heaven? What do you think Heaven is like? I read some references to try to get some kind of a description and there was really nothing very good. Jesus refers to the Kingdom, He refers to Paradise, but He doesn't tell us what it is going to be like. This is what the Catholic Catechism said that Pope Benedict XII wrote January 29, 1336:



“By virtue of our apostolic authority, we define the following: According to the general disposition of God, the souls of all the saints...and other faithful who died after receiving Christ’s holy Baptism (provided they were not in need of purification when they died,...or, if they then did need or will need some purification, when they have been purified after death,...) already before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgment – and this since the Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into heaven – have been, are and will be in heaven, in the heavenly Kingdom and celestial paradise with Christ, joined to the company of the holy angels. Since the Passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, these souls have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature.”<sup>55</sup>

Oh.

“This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description.”<sup>56</sup>

Okay, I feel better now.

“Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom.”<sup>57</sup>

Beer for others, vodka for really good guys.

“The Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise: (As Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians: ‘no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.’”<sup>58</sup>

The Baltimore Catechism said: “The happiness of heaven chiefly consists in beholding God face to face in His grandeur and beauty.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 267.

<sup>56</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 268.

<sup>57</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 268.

<sup>58</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 268.

Did any of that tell you anything? When I was little, my burning question that I would ask my sister: “are there going to be Twinkies in heaven?” Because my very favorite thing, to shove down my throat, were Hostess Twinkies. Heaven couldn’t possibly be Heaven without Twinkies being there. People sometimes ask me, especially when their little kids are with them, that their family animal died. ‘Father did my dog go to Heaven?’ I know priests who say, ‘No absolutely not. That it is blasphemous to say that animals go to Heaven.’ I look at little kids - and I look at this kid in the mirror - and I say to those little kids - and I say to myself – “Heaven wouldn’t be Heaven if our animals weren’t there.” I thoroughly expect my Coalhouse and my Thor, and my Atticus - if I do not predecease him - to be there. Heaven.

When I was a little kid I tried to wrap my mind around what “forever and ever and ever” meant. Did you ever do that? I would sit there at my grammar school desk and when it was boring, whatever the nun was teaching, that is one of the things that I would think about. I would think about this big spiral and that was forever and ever and ever and ever. And going to Heaven forever, that was really a lovely idea. Now I wonder about Heaven, is it going to get boring? Do you ever think that?

*We’re going to have God’s love in heaven and that will be enough.*

*I think about heaven and the saints. We say for them to pray for us. Do they? Do they really care?*

I like to think that. I think that they do. I have prayed to my mother, I have prayed to my brother. Sure I have.

*Are they watching us?*

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<sup>59</sup> Francis J. Connell, 4.

Do you ever think about that? I do. I wonder when I am going to do something if my mother is watching me saying, “Don’t do that!” I don’t know. Then there is this whole psychic thing. One of my good buds died about eight or nine years ago and her daughter went to see a psychic. The psychic said to the daughter, without knowing anything, she said, “Who is Tom?” And she said, ‘Well, there are two Toms in our lives.’ The psychic said, ‘The one who prays for your mother all the time. That Tom.’ She said ‘because my uncle, my mother’s brother is a Tom and there is another Tom who is as much our family as if he were blood. He prays for her all the time,’ she says. And she said, ‘Well, I would imagine he does, he is a priest. Oh, your mother says for him to stop, it is not necessary.’ So, I stopped, I don’t have to pray for her anymore. I don’t know if I believe any of this stuff. I really don’t.

We don’t know what Heaven is going to look like; we don’t know what it is going to be like. The only way we can describe it is in terms that we would understand by way of our own mortal human nature. We are going to see the beatific vision of God? I hope that is going to be wonderful because when I was in Niagara Falls I was done after about ten minutes. Time to go. I long ago stopped taking ski pictures. If you’ve seen one snowy mountain in the Rockies, you’ve seen them all really. So I don’t know.

*Do you pray to saints and to people?*

I still pray to them all and I pray for all of them. I am going to cover all my bases. Every time somebody comes in to get a Mass card and the Mass cards now are in January of 2014 - every time we are telling somebody when the next available Mass is, all I hear is my mother. My mother used to say ‘I don’t want to be in Purgatory all that time

waiting for these Masses to be done for me.' I never say it to anyone who comes in, but right away the voice of my mother - since I was this big - goes in my head. Are we doing Masses for my mother? Sure. Do I believe she is in Heaven? Yes. Is it nice to do Masses for my mother? Yes. I don't know how to balance that out.

Back to our Eternal Life. We are looking forward to Heaven - for this unbelievable, inconceivable, incomprehensible happiness. We don't know what it is going to be like. We don't know what it is going to look like, but we all want to get there.

I remember the first year I was going to go live and work in Haiti. I wouldn't go until I had my ski trip planned for the following winter. I knew that no matter how difficult things were going to get and how unhappy I was going to be, that there was something for me to look forward to. Isn't that life? Looking forward to something that is better than this. It is going to be perfect. There is not going to be any more crying, any kind of difficulty. To be in this beautiful, blissful place that is far beyond what our wildest imaginations can begin to comprehend: Twinkies or not, animals or not, alcohol or not.

Jesus died this day for you and for me so that you and I would know the way to get to Heaven and that once we get there the doors of the pearly gate, or whatever, would be wide open for us, and the only thing that would ever get in our way, is we ourselves. And so we strive day by day, not to be a kingdom divided against ourselves. We do deeds of mercy, both publicly and privately. We forgive when there is not a shred of forgiveness left in our hearts, but we do it anyway. There are times of joy and sorrow.

We walk in the footsteps of Jesus and try our very best every day not to get lost on our way to the Kingdom of God that we can't describe, but which we believe is there.

At least I think we believe it is there; I believe it is there. We walk in the footsteps of Jesus who is the Way and the Truth and the Life. We follow His way and we try to live His truth and we embrace His life in the here and now, confident that the day is going to come. And, in spite of ourselves, and all the reasons we might think we don't deserve to go there, God is going to embrace us in His justice and His love and in His mercy, and give us the rewards of the life that you and I lived to the best of our ability day after day after day. And so the goal and the prize is in front of us and when this mortal life is ended, Jesus calls us to Eternal Life in the Kingdom. And I hope I see you all there.

**Appendix L**  
**Faith Friday – Scripture Night**  
**Evaluation**

1.) Choose the most appropriate response:

I      *frequently*      *sometimes*      *rarely*      *never*      read the Bible.

2.) Whether or not you personally read the Bible, you hear Scripture passages at Sunday Mass. Do you/can you make connections between what you've read or heard and your daily life?

Frequently                  Sometimes                  Rarely                  Never

3.) Tonight's teaching covered a variety of topics regarding Scripture. About what specific areas would you like to learn more? (These could be used for *short* teachings at monthly meetings.)

e.g. images of God in Hebrew Scripture, the Protestant doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, Christian Scripture bases for Catholic Sacraments, specific Books of the Bible

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4.) If tonight's teaching has raised any questions, what are they? (Again, these may be topics addressed at monthly meetings.)

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5.) Further comments? Observations?

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Legible Signature \_\_\_\_\_ (Optional)

**Appendix M  
Faith Friday – Celibacy/Married Clergy**

**Evaluation**

1.) This presentation helped me to better understand clerical celibacy in the Catholic Church.

**Yes**

**No**

**Somewhat**

2.) I think that clerical celibacy is necessary in the Catholic Church.

**Yes**

**No**

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3.) I think that clerical celibacy is a value in the Catholic Church.

**Yes**

**No**

**Perhaps**

4.) I believe that priestly ordination to be open to (choose as many as you like):

**Celibate men only**

**Married Men**

**Celibate women**

**Married women**

5.) Any further observations or comments about tonight's subject matter?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Legible Signature \_\_\_\_\_ *(Optional)*

**Appendix N**  
**Saint Joseph Day – Mass Homily and Dinner Presentation**  
**Evaluation**

1.) I participate in at least one Parish Ministry, e.g. Usher, Lector, Eucharistic Minister, etc.

**Yes**

**No**

2.) What (additional) Parish Ministry would you like to be a part of – if any?

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3.) If you've never been a part of any Parish Ministry – why not?

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4.) I agree with the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage.

**Yes**

**No**

If not, why? \_\_\_\_\_

5.) I agree with the Catholic Church's teaching on divorce and remarriage.

**Yes**

**No**

If not, why? \_\_\_\_\_

6.) I believe that two homosexuals have the right to: *(choose one)*

*Civil Unions Only   Civil Marriage   Sacramental Marriage   No Societal Approbation*

**Legible** Signature \_\_\_\_\_ *(Optional)*



**Appendix O**  
**Good Friday 2013 – Presentation on Eternal Life**

**Evaluation**

1.) I believe in Heaven.      **Yes**                      **No**

2.) I believe in Hell.            **Yes**                      **No**

3.) I believe in Purgatory.    **Yes**                      **No**

4.) I believe in Limbo. **Yes**                      **No**

5.) If you believe in Heaven, what do you think it is like?

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6.) If you believe in Hell, do you think God sends people there or that people send themselves to Hell. (Circle one)

*God sends people to Hell.      People send themselves to Hell.      Both      Neither*

7.) If you believe in Hell, what do you think it is like?

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8.) Do you believe that only Baptized People can go to Heaven?

**Yes**

**No**

9.) In your personal prayer life, do you pray for the dead?

**Yes**

**No**

10.) What about tonight's topic(s) would you like to learn more about?

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**Legible** Signature \_\_\_\_\_ (Optional)

**Appendix P**  
**Letter to National Chaplain, Archbishop William E. Lori**

November 26, 2013

The Most Reverend William E. Lori  
 Supreme Chaplain, The Knights of Columbus  
 320 Cathedral Street  
 Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Dear Archbishop Lori:

I read with both joy and interest your article about a series on Men's Spirituality in November's issue of Columbia Magazine. For the last number of years I have been serving as Chaplain of our Ramapo Valley Council #5846 of The Knights of Columbus here in Oakland. I am a second generation Knight.

Currently I am completing my Doctor of Ministry Degree (Drew University, Madison, New Jersey). My project for this degree was with our local Knights of Columbus Council, focusing on Men's Spirituality. The title of my dissertation is "Reclaiming Men's Spirituality Through a Renewal of the Knights of Columbus." One of the goals of my project was to further the Knights' knowledge and understanding of their faith. They cannot witness to and defend that about which they know all too little.

The project began with a questionnaire sent to every member that gave them the opportunity to voice both their opinions and experiences of The Knights of Columbus. I also sought direction from them about topics in which they would be interested, topics that became the basis of five presentations made to the members during the Lenten Season of 2012. Thus we had evenings wherein we discussed (and I made major addresses on) Scripture, Celibacy, Marriage and Eternal Life. Another presentation was the homily at our Saint Joseph's Men's Mass during which I explored specifically the Role of the Layman in the Church, an address that I repeated to a Men's Group at another parish just a week ago. Other topics about which they had expressed interest have become topics of regularly scheduled Spirituality Nights (some with wives and some without wives). We are also planning to include a teaching as part of each month's meeting come the Fall of 2014.

The series was very well-received and quite well-attended. Imagine Knights of Columbus standing at the bar having a drink, and rather than talking about the previous night's basketball game, they were discussing the Bible – and posing more questions to me! Questions and comments posed both during and after my presentation on marriage indicated a wide array of opinions, sometimes voiced by the unlikeliest of members.

A series of articles on Men's Spirituality that reflects the changing role of men in society, as well as the confusion that men experience on many levels, will be very valuable, especially if it moves beyond ideals and pietism. When my dissertation is complete and accepted, I had wanted to make it (and my methodology) available to every Chaplain as a means of renewal for his individual Council.

Far too many people believe that The Knights of Columbus is secular organization without any Church affiliation, or worse yet, a men's drinking club. It is incumbent upon us to change that perception, and sometimes that perception needs to be changed among the membership itself. We have made several important steps in that direction here in Council #5846, and I would be pleased to be a catalyst in helping other Councils/Chaplains do the same.

Sincerely,

Rev. Thomas Paul Lipnicki

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