



K O C O A

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ARIZONA STATE COUNCIL

Brother Knights of Arizona
December 3, 2018



Address for the District Deputies of the Knights of Columbus at 2018/2019 Mid Year Meeting in Sierra Vista AZ

The address to this years Mid-Year meeting was presented by Father Robert Norman Neske. Fr. Rob Neske is a US Army veteran having served 20 years as a Ranger chaplain. He was an Anglican priest who left that calling and became a Catholic. He aspired to become a priest again and needed the approval of the Vatican which was granted through a special program instituted by St John Paul II.

Fr. Neske was Ordained January 30th, 2016 at St Andrew the Apostle Church, Sierra Vista, Arizona.

1 December 2018

As someone who has spent most of his adult life writing homilies and lectures for a living, I pay attention to words. Words fascinate me, their meaning and their use, and I truly believe they matter. For example, there are seven words which we use in our exemplification rite for the First Degree that never fail to catch my attention. They are: “on your honor as a Catholic Gentleman,” the key words being ‘a Catholic Gentleman.’

It isn't the Catholic part that is so remarkable since we are a Catholic order; it is particularly the word ‘gentleman.’ This word has become an almost archaic term rarely used anymore, especially in our current climate where rudeness appears to be valued, courtesy is viewed as weakness and, when extended toward the opposite sex is dismissed as sexism or worse. All of which would seem to indicate that our culture no longer knows the meaning of the word ‘gentleman’ or even cares.

For our founder, the Venerable Michael J. McGivney, the words ‘gentle’ and ‘gentlemen’ would have had particular meanings. And one cannot but think that Father McGivney was very intentional in his choice of “gentlemen” to describe the men who would make up our Order, especially as so many of them were men or were the sons of men who had come to America from class-based societies.

In those places, to be a gentleman meant you belonged to the gentry, a class of citizen that was below the nobility but, because of birth,



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wealth, power or position within the society, commanded respect. Working men were not gentry, factory hands were not gentry, day laborers were not gentry, nor would they ever be called 'gentlemen' and certainly not if they were also Catholic. We must not forget that at the time of our founding, and for long thereafter, the Catholic Church and Catholic men in particular were not held in high regard in Protestant America. Much of the country didn't even think we belonged here.

What Father McGivney understood and would have the men of our Order understand is: (A) That is rubbish! This is America! We do not live in a class society regardless of what anyone might tell us; and (B) A gentleman is distinguished by his character and conduct, not by any other consideration.

A gentleman is courteous, gracious, considerate, generous, not violent, harsh or rough, and, when the title is applied to a knight, chivalrous in his actions toward women, especially, and those who are less fortunate than himself. A Catholic gentleman is all of this and also one who practices his faith openly and without apology.

The Four Points of the Compass which form the pillars of our Order, Charity, Unity, Fraternity and Patriotism, are meant to reflect both the duty of a Catholic Gentleman and how we wish to be viewed by the larger community and the secular world. By our **Charity** - our good work among those in need - we will earn the respect of the world around us. By demonstrating our **Unity** - that we share a will and a purpose - those who would dismiss us must take notice of our strength. By our **Fraternity** - in our shared Faith, fellowship and character - they will see and respect our integrity. And by our **Patriotism** - in war and in peace - we will *demand* the respect of our fellow countrymen. So, it has been throughout our history as an Order.

So why do I bring this up? Why are these words so important? They matter because these words define for us what it means to be a Catholic man. Sadly, however, to be a Catholic man and more particularly a Catholic gentleman means that whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, our culture is at war with us. Why? Because we are counter-cultural; being a Catholic man and gentleman means living up to and upholding the values of our order and, most importantly, the tenets and values of our Catholic faith. These are not the values of our larger secular society.



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We draw the particular hostility of the world in our view of the human being and of life itself. We hold that earthly life begins at conception and ends at natural death, the timing to be determined by God alone. We believe that human beings each have unique dignity and value, that we are not disposable or interchangeable items. We believe that God created us male and female, that people do not choose their sex nor should seek to change their sex because they think God has made a mistake or that “gender” is simply a malleable concept. Holding these positions means we are the enemy and that we are on the “wrong side of history” as a former President of the United States has declared.

This is a lie. It is a lie our young people are being taught and it is a lie our young people are embracing, largely because they do not know what it is to be a man or a woman. If you do not know how to be what you are then everything else starts to fall apart and you lose your sense of meaning and purpose. This is a real danger our young people face today. It was recently reported that, for the third year in a row, the life expectancy of people in this country has gone down. In developed countries the life expectancy rises. In our country it goes down. Why?

The answer is suicide and opioid abuse and overdose – primarily among young adults. Both of these factors are driven by a lack of meaning and purpose. Eighty plus years ago the German theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer said of Nazi Germany: “People now live as if there is no God.” Welcome to America in 2018. Jesus asked: “And when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

As Knights, our concern must be for our Catholic young men, to counter the notion that God is absent and that men are unnecessary or only the incompetent buffoons portrayed in commercials on the television. These are lies and must be shown by us to be lies. Young people, especially teenaged young men, learn by watching their elders. This is a fact as old as time itself both for good and for ill. Thirty years ago, the poet Robert Bly said it best: “Young men need older men to admire them.” It is how they learn.

In her recent twin biography of the director John Ford and John Wayne, which is really a study in positive masculinity, the writer Nancy Shoemaker wrote: “At their best, the qualities and attributes that make men, men, are also qualities that define the finest of human behavior...to be peaceful but to be ready, to respect women, to be loyal to friends and family, to be willing and able to change your mind, to master yourself, to mentor the young, and to face the end with dignity.” I would add “and to have faith in God and to practice that faith.”



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These are certainly the qualities and characteristics many of us aspire to achieve in our lives as men. They are also the qualities I have been privileged to see in so many of the men I have encountered in the Knights of Columbus, and are the very characteristics we need to pass on to our sons, grandsons, nephews and family friends, but also to our daughters, granddaughters and nieces because we want them to know the difference between a boy who lacks character and a young man who will respect them and be good to them and good for them. It will also instill in our daughters what it means to be both a woman and a lady.

As those charged with providing leadership for our Order, I believe that we should energetically commit to do all that we can to encourage Catholic young men, as soon as they have reached the age of eighteen, to join our Order and to also intentionally point boys in their younger teens in the direction of the Knights. The Four Points of the Compass, lived out in the context of our Catholic Faith, provide meaning and purpose in a world that offers little beyond self-gratification, isolation and emptiness. With this compass, we can navigate safely through this life to our true end in union with our God who reaches out to us in love and offered for us his Son as the Way, the Truth, and Life itself.

Let us consider those Four Points again. Charity: to see beyond oneself and seek the good of another – in other words, to love. Unity – to share a common Faith with like-minded men and serve common goals for the betterment of the immediate world around us. Fraternity – to have the support and friendship of like-minded men. Patriotism – to share our love of our country and to work, pray and seek to preserve the principles upon which it was founded, to maintain, as the Founding Fathers counseled, the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity.

One of the prayers of our Order reminds us that as Knights “we are always observed.” As those called to positions of leadership it is imperative that we ensure that young men see in all Knights what it is to be a man in the best sense of that word, but more importantly to see what it means to be a Catholic Gentleman.

Vivat Jesus!

Rev. Father Robert Norman Neske