



To the Knights of Columbus

As the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus gathers in Dallas for its 122nd Annual Convention, I send warm greetings and the assurance of my closeness in prayer to all the Knights and their families.

The theme chosen for this year's Convention – *Now is the Hour of the Lay Faithful* – is not only one close to my own heart, but is fully in accord with the prophetic vision of your founder, the Servant of God Father Michael McGivney. It is my hope that your deliberations will confirm the Knights in fidelity to their baptismal vocation of “building up the Church, sanctifying the world and imbuing it with the Spirit of Christ” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 16). May they also enable your Order, in its impressive array of fraternal, charitable and educational services, to contribute ever more effectively to the great work of ecclesial renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council.

In my Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, I expressed my conviction that the lay faithful by their lived witness to the Gospel in daily life, “are largely responsible for the future of the Church” (No. 44) and the pursuit of her saving mission. The Council reminded us that the Church is a communion built up by a variety of charisms, ministries and services, and that the laity have the proper vocation of shedding the light of the Gospel on every sector of social, cultural and political life (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 44). Fidelity to this lofty calling will demand of all the baptized a concerted effort to overcome every separation between the faith they profess and the lives they lead, as well as an ever more conscious effort to understand, appropriate and

promote the truths and values embodied in the Church's teaching. I willingly take this occasion to express my gratitude for the efforts made by your Order to ensure that all its members benefit from a catechetical and spiritual formation which enables them to understand and appreciate their dignity and mission within the Body of Christ. I also encourage you to continue to work as a leaven within American society for the promotion of social justice, the protection of human life and all forms of loving service to those in need.

May these days of reflection and prayer on the service which the Knights are called to offer for the spread of the Gospel also bear fruit in a deeper appreciation of that spirituality of communion and mission which ought to inspire all relationships in the Church and every work of the apostolate (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43). In harmony of mind and heart with your Bishops and priests, may you "make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force" (*Eph 4:3*). The challenge of the new evangelization demands of all the baptized a forthright commitment to cooperate in strengthening the fabric of ecclesial communion and thus contributing to the extension of God's Kingdom. I commend the efforts which your Order has made to promoting priestly and religious vocations, conscious that a greater sense of the dignity of the lay vocation inevitably leads to a greater appreciation of the need to foster vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life.

Entrusting the deliberations of the Supreme Council to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, I assure the Knights and their families of a special remembrance in my prayers. To all of you I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of wisdom, strength and peace in the Lord.

From Castel Gandolfo, 18 July 2004

John Paul II