



To the Knights of Columbus

Once again the annual convention of the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus offers me the occasion to send you my cordial greetings and good wishes. I pray that your assembly, held this year in Cincinnati, Ohio, will be a time of reflection and of recommitment to the high ideals of faith and fraternal solidarity which inspired the foundation of your Order. For well over a century the Knights have made a distinctive contribution to the Church's mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and of working for the advancement of his Kingdom amid the changing circumstances of society. Today, as our world stands on the threshold of a new era marked by unprecedented opportunities and equally grave challenges, the Church urgently needs a consistent and convincing lay witness to the truth of the Christian message and its power to help in the building of a more just and humane society. I am confident that the Knights of Columbus, in fidelity to their finest traditions, will continue to provide the authentic formation in faith and the practical opportunities for Christian service which will enable Catholic laymen and women to serve as a true leaven of the Gospel in every sector of society.

As individuals and in the local Councils, the Knights of Columbus are enthusiastically taking part in the Church's program of spiritual preparation for

the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. During the present year, dedicated to a renewed appreciation of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church, all the faithful are called “to renew their hope in the definitive coming of God’s Kingdom, preparing for it daily in their lives, in the Christian community to which they belong, in their particular social context, and in world history itself” (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 46). Joyful hope, rooted in the new life poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), is the distinguishing mark of those who believe in Christ. To radiate this hope is surely one of the most effective means by which the Knights can actively contribute to the new evangelization. The witness of hope is in fact one of the most powerful and attractive signs of the salvation which the Gospel offers to the men and women of our time, so frequently tempted to discouragement and despair. I encourage all the Knights, most especially the young and those with young families, to strive to become ever more effective beacons of Christian joy and hope in the circumstances of their daily lives: at home, in the workplace and in society as a whole.

For generations the Knights of Columbus have helped to spread the Gospel message by showing solidarity with those in need. In this way your Order has contributed to that outstanding “history of charity” (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 87) by which Christ’s followers in every age have sought to serve him in the least of his

brothers and sisters. Once more I commend your tireless witness to the sanctity of life, your efforts to draw public attention to the tragic destruction of innocent lives by abortion and your work to ensure adequate legal protection of the right to life wherever it is threatened. Certainly you show to the world the hope that is in you (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) by working together with all people of good will in building a culture of respect for life and for the inviolable dignity of each human person made in God's image. At the same time, I appreciate your efforts to provide practical guidance and assistance to young families and to promote a fuller understanding of the God-given dignity of marriage and the family. This form of lay witness is an essential part of the Church's proclamation of God's plan for the family amid rapid and often bewildering changes in society.

The Great Jubilee calls the Church to a renewed commitment to understanding the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and applying them to the life of every individual and to the whole Church (cf. *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 20). The Council called upon all the baptized to grow in appreciation of their Christian vocation and to work for the advancement of the Church's mission in the world. As the various assemblies of the Synod of Bishops held since the Council have insisted, the various gifts, vocations and ministries in the Church, as gifts of the Spirit of life, are complementary and are meant to cooperate harmoniously in building up the Body of Christ. Within this

harmonious constellation of gifts, each state of life - priestly, religious and lay - expresses in its own way an aspect of the one mystery of Christ and provides encouragement and support to the others. I am grateful for your constant efforts to promote religious and priestly vocations, and I ask you to continue to pray that many young people will respond generously to the Lord's call to serve him in the Church.

With gratitude for the clear testimony of love for Christ and his Church which distinguishes the Knights of Columbus, I commend all of you and your families to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church. As a pledge of joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, May 29, 1998

Joannes Paulus II