

Address of H.E. Msgr. Luigi Bonazzi, Apostolic Nuncio
Knights of Columbus Dinner
April 26, 2014
Vancouver, BC

Dear Archbishop Miller,
My dear Knights of Columbus,
Dear Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful,

I am pleased to be with you this evening, on the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday when our Holy Father, Pope Francis, will raise to the glory of the altars, Blessed Pope John XXIII and Blessed Pope John Paul II. I imagine that many of you in this room this evening have a vivid memory of the historic visit of Pope John Paul II to Canada in 1984, including the time he spent here in Vancouver. Perhaps some of you served as Fourth Degree Honor Guard or provided other services at the different venues during the course of his visit.

I greet your esteemed Archbishop and thank him for the welcome he has extended me since my arrival in Canada at the beginning of March.

Situated as it is, on the great Pacific Rim, Vancouver is today the gateway through which people coming to Canada from the nations of the Far East enter, as it is also the point of departure for all who carry out business and trade with those nations. And so it is a strategic and privileged place from which to undertake that evangelization which Jesus commanded and which the Church invites all the faithful to make their contribution.

Among the various ecclesial institutions, you too, the Knights of Columbus, have a key role to play in this work, including as well, welcoming the stranger and making them feel very much at home. For those who come to this country, it can be an unsettling experience.

In this context, it is helpful to recall the circumstances in which the Knights of Columbus was established. At a time of a heavy influx of Catholic immigrants into the United States, Catholic men suffered many disabilities and various forms of discrimination. And so your founder, Fr. Michael McGivney, was determined to provide a network of support, to help these men keep their Catholic faith and identity, to allow them to overcome isolation by meeting other Catholic men in a social setting and to unite in common purposes of benevolence and care for those in need.

And so welcoming the stranger, establishing connections and ties of friendship, strengthening the Catholic identity of men who are under many pressures including the abandonment of the faith, and efforts to draw upon their nobler aspirations to participate in works of charity and compassion, is very much a part of the tradition and heritage of your Fraternal Organization.

I would hope that in your endeavors, you never lose sight of supernatural considerations. Philanthropy without reference to God fails to meet the deeper human needs, for as Pope Benedict XVI reminded us, *“If we do not give them God, we give them too little!”* (Message for 28th World Youth Day, 2013) That is why our Catholic tradition has always insisted upon the Spiritual as well as the Corporal Works of Mercy.

The Spiritual Works of Mercy require that the person extending that spiritual care do their own ‘homework’ in this area of their lives. St. Gregory Nazianzus teaches us: *“We must begin by purifying ourselves before purifying others; we must be instructed to be able to instruct, become light to illuminate, draw close to God to bring him close to others, be sanctified to sanctify...”* (St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 2,71,74,73:PG 35,480-481)

As we prepare for tomorrow’s celebration, let us rejoice in God’s gift of mercy especially as it was manifest in the lives of two great pontiffs: Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II. Both were truly “witnesses of God’s mercy” to the world. Through their most powerful intercession, let us renew our efforts in the work of evangelization so that in all we say or do, we will recall the words of the Lord: *“Blessed are the merciful, for mercy they shall receive.”* (Mt. 5:7)

Thank you.