

**A Mass in Celebration of the Ecclesial Mission and
Intercession of Blessed Fr. Michael McGivney, Diocesan
Priest and Founder of the Knights of Columbus**

Homily of Bishop John O. Barres

Diocese of Rockville Centre

St. Anthony of Padua Parish

East Northport, NY

May 4, 2023

Holy priests have shaped the history of the United States. Their heroism, evangelizing zeal, and pastoral charity are woven into our nation's story.

Looking to those priest Saints and Blesseds who labored in this part of God's vineyard that is *the land of the free and the home of the brave*, we see a wide and beautiful American kaleidoscope of "holiness and mission" in the Catholic priesthood.

Think of the New York Jesuit martyrs: Saints Isaac Jogues (1607-1646), Rene Goupil (1608-1642), and Jean de Lalande (d. 1646).

Recall the Redemptorist Saint John Neumann (1811-1860), the Bishop of Philadelphia, and his confrere, Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos (1819-1867).

See the missionary hearts of Saint Juniper Serra (1713-1784) in California and Saint Damien of Molokai (1840-1889) in Hawaii.

Call to mind the Capuchin Blessed Solanus Casey (1870-1957), a mystical porter who opened the Doors of Christ to so many souls.

Think, too, of Blessed Stanley Rother (1935-1981), a parish priest-missionary from Oklahoma who died as a parish priest-martyr in Guatemala.

Spanning centuries, their priestly holiness has animated the life of the Church and contributed to our growth as *one nation under God*.

--

Thanks be to God that on October 31, 2020, this illustrious list of priest Saints and Blesseds increased with the Beatification of Father Michael J. McGivney (1852-1890).¹

With Catholics around the world, especially the two million members of the Knights of Columbus, we continue to celebrate this new Blessed. What a privilege it was on October 31, 2020 for us, just hours after his Beatification Mass at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Hartford, to offer Mass at the historic St. Mary's Church in New Haven.

This parish on Hillhouse Avenue in New Haven is intimately connected to Blessed Fr. McGivney. Father McGivney came to serve the people of St. Mary's parish after his ordination in 1877; here, for seven years, he celebrated Mass, preached the Word of God, baptized, heard confessions, anointed the sick, witnessed marriages, developed friendships, received converts, and gave counsel; here, in the church's basement, on March 29, 1882, he founded the Knights of Columbus; there, he was a priest; and there, fittingly, his mortal remains rest.

--

Our readings today are providential. How easy it is to see them reflected in the life of Blessed Fr. Michael McGivney as we celebrate this Mass with his relics close at hand.

The Dicastery for the Causes of Saints describes the purpose of the veneration of relics: "Relics in the Church have always received particular veneration and attention because the body of the Blesseds and of the Saints, destined for the resurrection, has been on earth the living temple of the Holy Spirit and the instrument of their holiness, recognized by the Apostolic See through beatification and canonization."²

Blessed Fr. Michael McGivney lived the missionary spirit of humility, gentleness, patience and peace described by St. Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians. He was a Divine Mercy instrument of communion and mission. He built up the Body of Christ.

Blessed McGivney lived the Beatitudes heroically in his priestly ministry.

¹ This homily draws on Bishop Barres' October 31, 2020 homily preached at St. Mary's Church in New Haven, CT just hours after Fr. McGivney's Beatification Mass at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Hartford, CT.

² Congregation for the Causes of Saints December 5, 2017 Instruction "Relics in the Church: Authenticity and Preservation."

In his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), Pope Francis reminds us that “The story of the Good Samaritan is constantly being repeated” (71) and that “each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders.” (69)

Fr. McGivney did precisely that. He made the daily moment-by-moment choice to live the contemplative spirit of the Good Samaritan.

We take this opportunity to celebrate Father McGivney’s spirit of holiness and mission manifested to this day in the global Good Samaritan mission of the Knights of Columbus. Whether it is advocating for persecuted Christians in the Middle East or supporting the people of Ukraine, the Knights can always be counted on!

We give thanks to God for our beloved Knights of Columbus and all the incredible work they do to support our evangelizing parishes on Long Island and to promote vocations to the priesthood through the intercession of Blessed Fr. McGivney.

--

After his time at St. Mary’s, Father McGivney became a pastor. There, in his second assignment at the Church of St. Thomas, he served his flock steadily during the pandemic of 1890 before he himself became ill and died of pneumonia at the age of 38. Though his life on earth was short, there are many dimensions that instruct us in the ways of holiness and mission. Allow me to highlight two.

First, Blessed McGivney’s life teaches us that losses and disappointing disruptions in our personal plans often serve to illuminate God’s providential plans for our ecclesial missions.

While studying in the seminary, Father McGivney lost his father. He returned home to help his mother care for his siblings and support the family, unsure if he could continue pursuing his priestly call. Thankfully, his Bishop intervened, assisted the family, and helped him return to the seminary.

While tumultuous for young Michael McGivney, perhaps it was that loss and providential disruption of his plans that opened his eyes to the plight of those in need. We can imagine the Holy Spirit used that direct experience of the Cross and the many hardships he witnessed in the life of his widowed mother in inspiring the Knights of Columbus.

Second, Father McGivney’s life shows forth the power of being Light and Truth.

In 1878, a year after his arrival at St. Mary’s, a story appeared in *The New York Times* on the recently constructed church. It shows well the environment into which

Father McGivney entered as a newly-ordained. At the article's end, we read the author's sentiment that this church on Hillhouse Avenue "invaded the most exclusive home of wealth and culture," and his plain belief that the church was "an eye-sore on the avenue, a source of annoyance and injury to neighboring residents."³

How did Father McGivney move in such an atmosphere? Well, with grace.

We can picture him walking up and down Hillhouse Avenue, home then to many prominent Yale faculty members and elites of the city. We can see him, too, with all his energy, crisscrossing New Haven, meeting townspeople, and frequently seeing Yale students.

What did they see when he was on the avenue or around town? In the words of Father Joseph G. Dailey, a contemporary of Blessed McGivney, we might say they saw, "a man of extreme grace of manner in any society, but without any airs...[they saw] 'a priest's face,' and," - as Father Dailey said so well - "that explains everything."

"It was a face of wonderful repose; there was nothing harsh in that countenance, although there was everything that was strong; there was nothing sordid, nothing mercenary, nothing of the politician, nothing of the axe-grinder. Guile and ambition were as far from him as from heaven."

Yale University's motto is *Lux et Veritas – Light and Truth*. We might say the Yale faculty members and students whom he met, and indeed any person in New Haven, saw in this humble, American-born priest something of the university's motto. They saw one who lived the Light and Truth of Christ wherever he went, whatever the atmosphere around him.

What reminders these are to us! To trust God in the midst of life's disruptions and to bring the Light and Truth of Christ wherever we go and to whomever we meet.

--

We celebrated the October 31, 2020 Mass just yards from the Yale campus and Woolsey Hall where graduates of Yale who died in every war from the Revolution to Vietnam are commemorated and inscribed by name on the walls of a moving rotunda.

³ *The New York Times*, "An Unprofitable Church: How an Aristocratic Avenue was Blemished by a Roman Church Edifice" July 28, 1879, Page 1.

Near to the place that honors their ultimate sacrifice, we offered the Sacrifice of the Catholic Mass and honored a priest who celebrated the Mass reverently and lived the Sacrifice of the Mass heroically and mystically “to the end” (cf. John 13:1).

In celebrating Blessed Michael J. McGivney this day, we give thanks for Christ’s gift of the priesthood, and we are grateful for those men who spend themselves for the good of the Church, those for whom “life is Christ, and death is gain.”

We think especially of those other holy American priests.

We recall Venerable Nelson Baker (1842-1936), Venerable Fulton Sheen (1895-1979), Venerable Patrick Peyton (1909-1992), and Venerable Augustus Tolton (1854-1897).

We remember Servants of God: Father Demetrius Gallitzin (1770-1840), Father Bernard Quinn (1888-1940), Bishop Francis Xavier Ford of Maryknoll and China (1892-1952), Father Edward Flanagan (1886-1948), the Military Chaplains Father Emil Kapuan (1916-1951) and Father Vincent Capadanno (1929-1967), and the Jesuits Father Walter Cizek (1904-1984) and Father John Hardon (1914-2000).

We remember, too, those holy priests unknown to us, men who faithfully lived their vocation and served the people entrusted to their care, as well as those priests in the history of our lives who have reflected the Face of Christ to us.

Recalling them, and with hearts full of gratitude, we ask the intercession of Blessed Father Michael J. McGivney for a rich new harvest of vocations to the priesthood for Long Island and the world.

Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of the Clergy, pray for us!

Blessed Michael J. McGivney, pray for us!