

GOING TO THE PERIPHERIES

8/1/2017

by Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH AND OF THE KNIGHTS IS INSPIRED BY POPE FRANCIS' CALL TO BECOME MISSIONARY DISCIPLES



LAST MONTH, I had the privilege of addressing the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops-sponsored Convocation of Catholic Leaders meeting in Orlando, Fla., on the topic of “The Joy of the Gospel in America.”

Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles and I gave keynote presentations to the thousands of Catholic leaders that had assembled on the topic of “Going to the Peripheries.”

Earlier that same day, our supreme chaplain, Archbishop William Lori, led a eucharistic procession and benediction for the convocation participants and then concluded the day by celebrating a special Fortnight for Freedom Mass.

The convocation, inspired by the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis titled *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), was a historic opportunity initiated by our bishops to respond to the pope’s call for “a new chapter of evangelization” in our country.

I began my address by noting that this year I had the opportunity to spend Holy Week in South Korea. During that time, I was privileged to meet a great missionary – Maryknoll Father Gerard Hammond, a priest and a Knight of Columbus who has traveled

into North Korea more than 50 times, most recently to treat desperately ill North Koreans who have no other hope of medical assistance.

I asked him why he spends so much of his life traveling and living under such dangerous and harsh conditions. His answer was simple: "Where there is great suffering, Jesus is there, and where Jesus is we must be also."

This brother Knight reminds all of us that through the Incarnation the Lord has united himself forever with suffering humanity – not as an abstraction but with each suffering person throughout history. I told those assembled in Orlando that Jesus is *already* at the peripheries. The question for us is whether he will be there alone or if his disciples will accompany him.

At the Knights of Columbus, we are committed to going beyond our own comfort zone and beyond our own nation to reach those peripheries.

For example, we help AIDS orphans in Uganda, homeless and displaced civilians in Ukraine, persecuted Christians in Egypt, survivors of genocide in Iraq, child refugees from North Korea, typhoon survivors in the Philippines, flood victims in Mexico and people with physical disabilities in Vietnam, Cuba and Haiti.

As Catholics, we profess a universal Church. As missionary disciples, we must make our universal Church increasingly present at the peripheries as the process of globalization accelerates. And as Knights of Columbus, we answer this call.

Quoting Blessed Paul VI, Pope Francis observed that today "people prefer to listen to witnesses: they 'thirst for authenticity' and 'call for evangelizers to speak of a God whom they themselves know'" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 150).

This means that the most difficult challenge many of us face may not be in reaching out to peripheries around the world; the most difficult challenge may be in reaching out to our own neighbor.

Those closest to us are precisely the ones who discern most clearly the authenticity of our witness. This is why the work of our local councils in parishes and communities throughout our jurisdictions is so important.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis calls Catholics to be “an evangelizing community [that] is filled with joy” (24), a community that is “permanently in a state of mission” (25), a community that practices a “fraternal communion and missionary fruitfulness” (89). He urges Catholics to “live in fraternity” (91) and to share “a fraternal love capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbor, of finding God in every human being” (92).

He then writes: “I especially ask Christians in communities throughout the world to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let everyone admire how you care for one another, and how you encourage and accompany one another” (99).

This is a particular responsibility for every Knights of Columbus council throughout the world.

Evangelii Gaudium is a special roadmap for the Knights of Columbus. I urge every brother Knight and every council to take up its great mission. In this way, we can make an indispensable contribution to the new evangelization.

Vivat Jesus!