
Homily for the Centennial Mass by Wilton Cardinal Gregory, Archbishop of Washington

33rd Sunday of the Church Year [B]
13 November 2021

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The scripture lessons from the closing weeks of November are not a very opportune point of reference during which to celebrate a happy or joyous event! Admittedly, we are about to enter the season often referred to in our secular world as “the holidays,” the readings from Sacred Scripture that belong to this time of the year are not very user-friendly, for happy events. The Church is well aware of the closing of the liturgical year and those times are given over to calling to mind that this world, as we know it, will pass away. The Word of God that we have just heard is rather frightening and not truly reflective of the joyous spirit that the members of the Knights of Columbus celebrating their centennial anniversary want to remember this evening.

Yet, if the pioneer members of the Patuxent Council were here present to observe the 100th Anniversary of their establishment, they would be astounded by the changes that have taken place not only for the Knights of Columbus but also for the entire Catholic community that is now the Archdiocese of Washington. They would note that the world has changed tremendously in the years that separate them from us. Much of the world that they knew has, in so many different respects, passed away.

Change is an unavoidable part of living. Some people would say that change is all there is to living. We see the seasons come and go. We witness the great advances that have been made in science, in medicine, in the arts and in literature. Change is the way that we mark time. Yet there is also something equally profound that occurs during the process of growing old - we bring with us things of enduring value, our precious treasures, our established principles, and, most importantly, our Faith. These treasures are carried forth from one generation to the next.

It is that strange mixture of things that have changed wedded to those things that cannot change that we celebrate this evening in Faith on the 100th Anniversary of the establishment of the Patuxent Council of the Knights of Columbus.

Relatively few people live to be 100 years of age - even in an age when people are living longer more productive lives and according to a recent US Census Bureau Report, there are more than 72,000 people living in the United States who are over 100 years old! When we discover someone who has managed to reach that goal, we tend to make a big thing of the event. Now and again local newspapers make note of even those ordinary and simple folks who reach such a milestone

in their life. When a person is 100 years old, even when their health is relatively robust, we often treat them as though they were weak or delicate. Folks who live to be a 100 are quite robust people - they had to have been so in order to survive! Yet we still tend to treat them with extra tenderness. We think of people who are 100 as somehow fragile and easily breakable.

Institutions that reach the century mark, however, are not seen as delicate and fragile, but as vigorous and strong. Institutions that past the mark of 100 years become signs of stability. However, in truth, there are many important similarities that might be made between people who are 100 and institutions that celebrate a centennial jubilee. First of all, 100 years whether measured in the life of an individual or in the history of an institution is a moment to be celebrated. Living to be 100 years means that a person or an institution has seen a lot of life. In 100 years, many changes have occurred. Some of those changes were life giving and some were marked with sorrow.

There are also the treasures that a person and an institution bring with them that need to be recognized when they celebrate their century moment. It is the Faith in God's Word and the Sacramental Life of the Church that we celebrate this evening in honoring the Patuxent Council of the Knights of Columbus. Catholic Mass is the same, although now we offer our prayers in English. The Sacraments are the same as they were 100 years ago although those of us who may now share them perhaps are new to the faith. The Word of God is the same though we apply it to different life-issues. The people who gather in prayer are different from those who first began this council although the Lord who gathers us together is the same. 100 years has brought many changes, but left some things unchanged.

Our jubilee celebration this evening is also about tomorrow. Just as the readings, that the Church proclaims to conclude the liturgical year can be stark or even alarming; our thanksgiving this evening for the century of Faith and changes that have marked the history of the Patuxent Council of the Knights of Columbus is also a time to look toward tomorrow. Few of us will be able to even anticipate being present throughout the next century. Although there may well be a toddler or child here present who will live to see the year 2121. Nonetheless, we can take great hope that the Church's Faith will endure all of the many challenges that humanity will face during this next century. It is that anchor that gives courage to our hearts - the same courage that marked the generosity and determination of the pioneer founders of the Patuxent Council and laid the foundation for the joy that we witness and exchange this evening. A 100 years is a very long time, but for folks with Faith, not a frightening time but one of joy!

