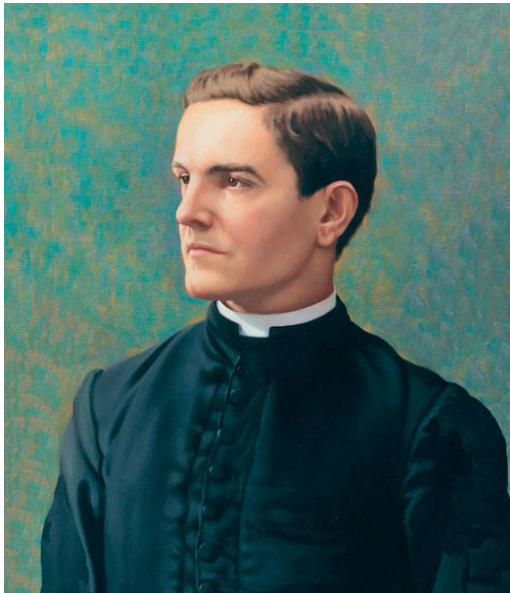




DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP



**A Mass in Celebration of the
Beatification of
Fr. Michael McGivney,
Diocesan Priest and Founder
of the Knights of Columbus**

**Saturday of the 30th Week of Ordinary
Time**

**Homily of Bishop John O. Barres
Diocese of Rockville Centre**

**St. Mary's Church, New Haven, CT
October 31, 2020**

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*.

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

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

This parish on Hillhouse Avenue is intimately connected to our new Blessed: Here, Father McGivney came to serve 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; here, he was a priest; and here, fittingly, his mortal remains now rest.

We are grateful to the Dominican Fathers who serve the parish and the people of St. Mary's for so graciously welcoming us, pilgrims from across the Sound in the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

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Our readings today are providential. How easy it is to see them reflected in the life of Blessed Michael McGivney.

He lived the spirit of humble missionary boldness described by St. Paul in his Letter to the Philippians. We can imagine Father McGivney repeating these words of the Apostle in personal prayer before spending himself in priestly work: "My eager expectation and hope is that with all boldness, now as always, Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me life is Christ, and death is gain."

Father McGivney's life also verifies the logic of St. Luke's Gospel, a logic that runs counter to the world: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." That's the spirit of Father McGivney. That's the Spirit of the Knights of Columbus.

We take this opportunity to celebrate Father McGivney's spirit of holiness and mission manifested to this day in the global mission of the Knights of Columbus.

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.

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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.”¹

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’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.

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We celebrate this Mass 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.

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

¹ *The New York Times*, “An Unprofitable Church: How an Aristocratic Avenue was Blemished by a Roman Church Edifice” July 28, 1879, Page 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 Ciszek (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 now Blessed Father Michael J. McGivney for a rich new harvest of vocations to the priesthood for Long Island and the world.

Blessed Michael J. McGivney, pray for us!