

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCE ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
OPENING MASS OF THE BIENNIAL MEETING OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF CATHOLIC KNIGHTS
23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, SEPTEMBER 10, 2017
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, WASHINGTON, DC**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

On this Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time, I welcome the International Alliance of Catholic Knights, as they gather their Biennial Meeting. I thank Bishop Shelton Fabre, their International Chaplain, for his kind invitation, and greet the International President Frederon DeKarlos Blackmon. As the representative of the Holy Father to this country, I want to express his spiritual closeness and paternal affection for all gathered here.

The International Alliance of Catholic Knights is a reminder of our shared, fraternal bonds as members of the Church. Although each one of us is different, each member contributes to the building up of the Body of Christ. In the members gathered in the basilica today, we see a remarkable unity in diversity in the Family of God.

Today's readings revolve around the idea of brotherly love in the community. The source of this love is the Blessed Trinity, a communion of love. In the second reading, Saint Paul says that *whole Law finds its fulfillment in love*; that is, that the Ten Commandments and the other precepts of the Law are summarized in one commandment: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Romans 13:8-10).

Love demands honesty and, at times, fraternal correction. In the book of Genesis, Cain arrogantly responds to God's question about his brother Abel with the words: "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" The answer, of course, is Yes. If we love one another, then we have a responsibility for one another.

Ezekiel speaks of this in the first reading. If we see a man and remain silent, failing to dissuade him from his wicked ways, the Lord tells us what awaits: "*The wicked shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death.*" It is never loving to allow someone to sin or to destroy themselves through sin; rather, true charity demands speaking the truth in love – in a gentle yet firm way. This requires courage and a truly prophetic spirit.

Our changing times demand prophetic voices, willing to exercise responsibility – not so much to reprove and chastise, but to persuade and accompany the sinner. In a sense, the Church needs new knights to defend the People of God from the assaults of the Evil One, who tempts and leads the person from the path of life to one of destruction. There is a need for a new generation of "watchman", who guard, protect, and accompany.

The idea of fraternal correction today is threatened by a culture of individualism. People often feel that even the slightest correction is done with malice, and offence is easily taken. Other times, fraternal correction, rooted in love, is considered interfering in another person's business - being a busybody. Despite these challenges, we are not excused from our responsibility for our brothers and sisters in faith. Indeed, admonishing the sinner and instructing the ignorant are among the spiritual works of mercy.

Should we be silent about the evils of pornography, drug use, prejudice and the like, dismissing them as "private" issues? Do we not have a responsibility to others to help restore

them to spiritual health? As individuals and as a Church, we have a duty to speak about these issues as well as other fundamental ones such marriage, family life, and the rights of the most vulnerable members of society. Silence can be construed as consent to grave evils and injustices. Once again, we must find our prophetic voices!

Experience teaches us that no one enjoys being corrected. It takes great humility to receive correction. Often, people respond defensively. In the Gospel, Jesus offers a method for fraternal correction. First, we are to approach the person privately. This involves a dialogue – speaking and listening, trying to understand the other person, while being forthright about the loving demands of God. If unsuccessful, the next step is to gather two or three people to bring the issue to the person's attention. The idea is that this is not a person-to-person attack. It is done as an individual and then as a small group to avoid humiliating, shaming or judging a person; fraternal correction demands prudence, sensitivity, and discretion.

Finally, if this fails, Jesus says that we should tell the church, those with His authority. Sometimes the person will remain hard-hearted, refusing even to listen to the church and will cut himself off from the Body, but other times, the person, open to the Spirit who works in the Church, will be converted and repent. This is the goal: conversion, return to the Lord, and reconciliation to the community.

Fraternal correction is difficult and demands being willing to engage in dialogue and even conflict out of true love for the other. In other words, we need to be loving in our motivation, prudent in our words, *and* courageous, taking a risk for the good of the other person. Like a physician, we must size up our patient, discern the best remedy to help the person wounded by sin to be restored to health, and offer a cure sincerely and charitably – even if the treatment will be met with resistance.

Fraternal correction is not about judging the other person; it is a service of love and involves humility. That is, if we are willing to correct others, we should be humble enough to receive correction from others. No one of us is perfect, but our own lack of perfection does not absolve us from our responsibilities toward members of the Church and society. If we are worried about the credibility of our witness, then we should seize this opportunity to be converted and to respond to God's grace.

There are many difficult things to do in life; fraternal correction is one of them. Fortunately, Jesus reminds us that when we have difficult decisions to make or are faced with offering challenging, yet loving words, He is with us: "*For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst.*"

Jesus also tells his disciples, "*Amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father.*" Let us take some time for silence to pray, especially for our brothers and sisters, who have fallen away from the Lord and His Church, that they may once more discover the Mercy and Love that God has for them.