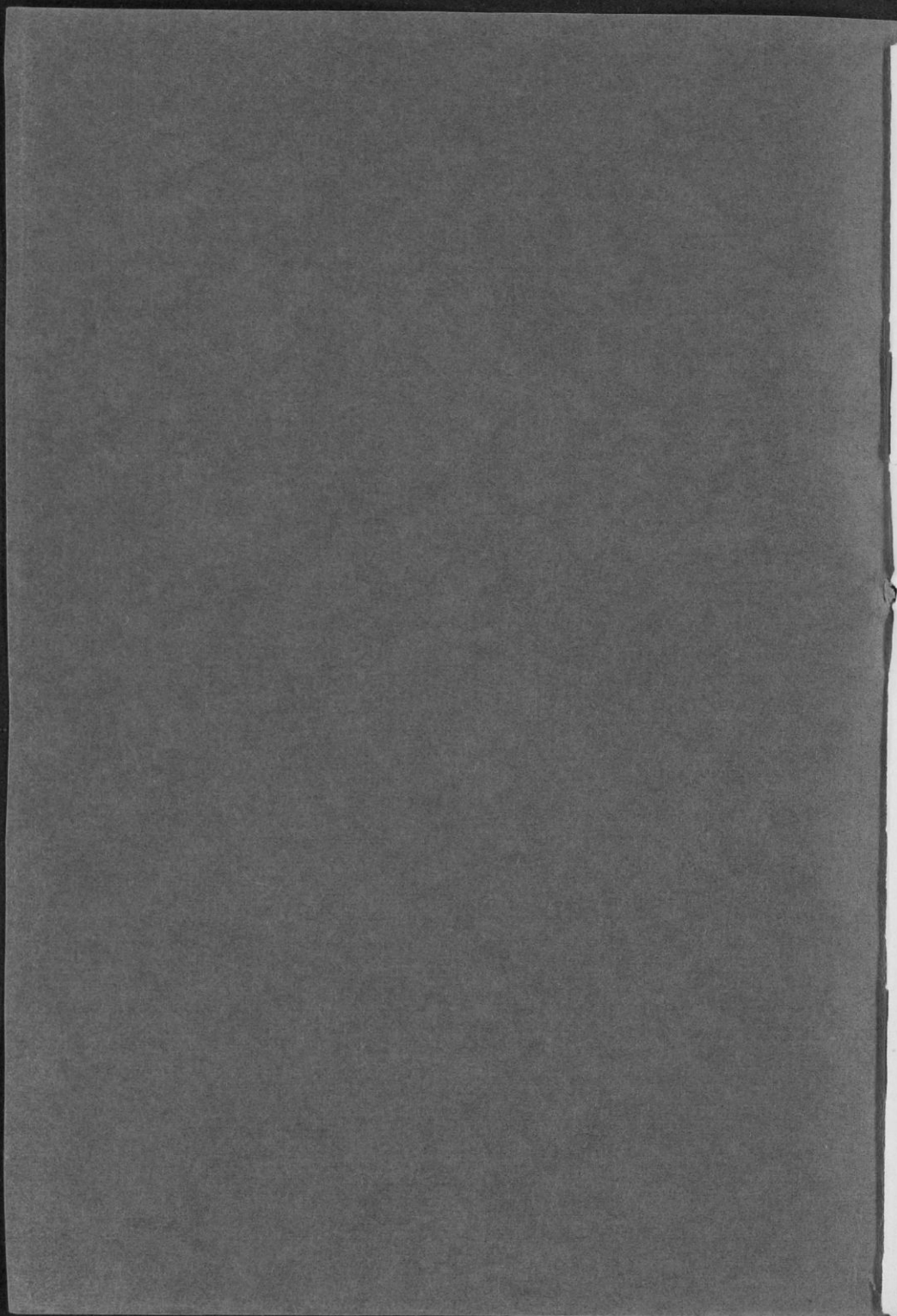


Christian Knighthood



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**QUALITIES OF CHRISTIAN KNIGHTHOOD—
THE REMEDY AGAINST THE SELFISH
AND SELF-SEEKING SPIRIT OF
THE AGE.(1)**

Following a custom established by your order, you have assembled this evening at a Vesper service to give expression to your faith as a Catholic organization, and to honor the memory of Columbus, whose name you bear and whose discovery of America you commemorate this day. Beautiful as is this custom, yet the significance of it would be valueless unless the lesson which this event teaches finds in your daily lives expressions of the faith, loyalty and devotion of this great hero and the sterling qualities of the knights of old. Your order in assuming this glorious name of Knights of Columbus evidently meant that the character, virtues and deeds as symbolized by these names should be the striking qualities of its members. Nothing could be grander nor nobler than these titles, which mean so much, and which should inspire you to loftier and holier aims. But what significance have you attached to these titles? Have you realized that they express something more than a mere name? Yes! They sum up for you your duties as Catholics to Christ and His Church, and your duties as citizens to this great country which Columbus discovered.

In what then does your loyalty to Christ and His Church manifest itself? Is it merely in fulfilling the commandments of God and observing the precepts of the Church?

(1) Sermon to the Knights of Columbus at the Boston Cathedral, Sunday Evening, Oct., 11, by the Rev. Joseph G. Anderson.



This is what is demanded of all Catholics; but is there nothing else in which you are interested and striving to advance God's glory and to promote the welfare of His Church on earth? Is there no cause,—no movement,—no work of serious import which appeals to you or rouses you to enthusiastic action for the interest of suffering humanity or for the moral uplift of society, or for the good of religion? This undoubtedly should be the aim and effort of a Catholic organization such as yours, composed as it is of representative, intelligent Catholic men. It is to such an organization that the Church looks for enthusiastic effort and encouraging support in all the great problems which affect her welfare and in all the important undertakings in which she is engaged.

But besides these duties to the Church, what interest and zeal are you showing as citizens in your country's welfare? What are you doing as citizens in her regard? Are you merely observing the laws, paying taxes, and exercising your right of suffrage? Is there nothing else in which you are interested or seeking to show your loyalty and devotion? Are there no evils that threaten the welfare and stability of society? Are there no problems which stir the body politic, in which you might be of service by voice, pen or deed? I mean by this not politics, for politics, as such, is rightly discarded from your organization, but social questions and social works in which you might, in a special way, show your interest and prove yourselves active citizens zealous for every cause that makes for the welfare of society.

These duties I purposely set before you this evening as a means of offsetting the petty, ignoble, selfish, and self-seeking spirit which characterizes the present age.

It is this spirit more than anything else that destroys all true sense of duty, warps all finer feelings of nobility of mind and generosity of heart, and weakens all generous impulses to noble deeds and heroic action. In order that you may fully realize the significance and importance of these duties, it is well for us to consider the qualities of Christian Knighthood as exemplified in the heroic knights of old and in the saintly character of Columbus, and contrast with the spirit of the age that gave birth to those qualities and aroused those deeds, the selfish, narrow spirit of our own days.

What was the character of the knights of old? I refer not to the notion, handed down to us by romancer and novelist, of the knight-errant bent only on conquest or tournament to display his skill at arms, or to win or defend his lady love, but the character which history reveals of him. It is in the age of chivalry that we first meet the type and qualities of manhood which later developed into the character of the knight. Chivalry under its best impulses developed a type of manhood, which for nobility of character, magnanimity of spirit, generosity of heart, self-sacrifice, and undaunted courage has rarely been equalled in the world's history. Under the refining influence of Christianity, these strong traits of character were fostered. Christian faith was the vivifying principle that actuated the lives of those men, and Christian teachings found expression in their daily lives. The age in which they lived called for manly qualities. There was no effeminacy or weakness in this type of character. There was no self-ease, no living for the mere indulgence of pleasure. It was a strong, manly type of vigorous hardihood that was the outcome of this period—a period that had passed through and

withstood the inroads of barbarian hordes and amalgamated these races into the nations of Europe. Loyalty to Christ and His Church is the first and striking characteristic of this age of chivalry.

Whenever the interest of Christ's Church was affected, then were men's hearts stirred, and their best efforts put forth for her welfare. The Church was so sacred in their eyes, that their devotion and duty to her were paramount and supreme. They were ready to sacrifice everything, even their lives, for her prosperity and success. In their relations with one another, and in the cause of their country's welfare, the highest principles of honor, justice, truth and honesty prevailed. Their word was their bond, so high was honor held. Might was not right—for justice held sway. Honesty and truth could not be bartered away, nor compromised by expediency or selfish gain. Neither human respect nor fear of the multitude could swerve them from these strong principles. With the courage to maintain honor, and the fearlessness to sustain right, the welfare of society was secure, and the relationship of man to his fellow-man was held in the strongest links of confidence and mutual regard. There were no self-seeking nor selfish interests which caused men to over-reach their neighbors or impugn the rights of others; but a spirit of fairness, of friendly good-will, honesty of purpose, and sincerity of aim, marked their mutual relationship. The rights of each were respected, the honesty and integrity of all were unquestioned, for confidence and honor prevailed. When dishonesty was discovered, or honor violated, then was meted out the severest punishment to the offender.

And yet with all these strong and manly traits there

was a liberality and generosity which manifested itself in most striking ways, namely, in a kindness of heart, a gentleness of spirit, a sympathy for suffering, and a willingness to sacrifice self for the welfare of others. The poor, the widows, and the orphans were regarded by them as Christ's afflicted ones, and were treated with such kindly consideration that they even vowed to protect, defend and succor them as the one sacred duty of their lives. This was the character and type which chivalry developed. It was this splendid spirit which prepared, trained and developed the type of manhood which was to become the knight. When conditions arose for the warlike type of man to defend society—to uphold religion—and to right wrongs; when Europe was threatened by the inroads of Saracen hordes, who, hating Christianity, would have destroyed the civilization and culture of centuries—then it was that the knights, prepared and trained by the spirit of chivalry, came forth as the valiant defenders of Christianity. To save Europe from destruction, to protect their Christian brethren from molestation and cruel treatment in the East, and to rescue the sacred places from the hands of those infidels were their sole aim and object. It was a remarkable outburst of generous self-sacrifice and undying devotion to religion and society which prompted these heroes to leave family, home and country, and take up this sacred cause.

No personal interest, no selfish aims, no emoluments nor earthly rewards prompted them to act, but only the highest motives and the purest aims—the cause of religion, and the welfare of society. What a glorious host of valiant heroes were these noble knights from every country in Europe, animated with the same spirit and united in the same cause! Witness them as they pass in review before

us as we read the pages of history. Behold a Godfrey de Bouillon, leading his valiant band of knightly warriors, beseiging and taking Jerusalem, and in the flush of victory, when his followers seek to crown him king, refusing to wear a crown of gold where his Saviour and Master wore a crown of thorns;—or a Baldwin, courageous and strong, holding sway over the conquered land with a gentle firmness that wins admiration from his vanquished subjects—or a saintly King Louis of France leaving his kingdom, and setting forth when the cause seemed lost, to battle again with the Saracen hosts, and even when taken prisoner, inspiring his enemies with awe for his saintly bearing, and admiration for his beautiful qualities of character. Had selfish interests and selfish motives prevailed in deterring this outburst of heroic effort and generous devotion, Europe would have been devastated and laid waste, and Christianity with its culture and civilizing influences would have been crippled and crushed for centuries. The cause was won by saving Europe from these Saracen invasions. The success furthermore of these Crusades was completed by the many incalculable benefits to Europe, and by the spirit of loyalty and devotion to Christ and His Church which they called forth.

In every country in Europe, the bones of the noble knights rest sacredly entombed in the shrines and temples which Christian faith has erected in honor of Christ. With the glory of these shrines their names and memory are linked. At Malta, to-day, in the Church of St. John, erected by the Knights, at every step are seen the names of valiant heroes whose bodies lie buried beneath the marble pavement, and whose monuments tell the story of their glorious deeds for Christ and His Church.

These were the knights of old. But there is another noble knight who long after the cause which had given rise to the crusades had ceased—would again seek to rescue the sacred places and win the world to Christ. Columbus was this saintly hero, with the same qualities and traits of the knights: loyalty to Christ, nobility of mind, magnanimity of soul, generosity of heart, self-sacrifice, and undaunted courage. He was convinced by study and years of experience on the seas, that there was a land beyond the then known world which would prove a western passage to the Indies or Cathay. His arguments and appeals met with little encouragement, but despite all difficulties and obstacles, he perseveringly continued until success crowned his efforts and he started on his voyage of discovery. It was not glory, nor gold, nor self-aggrandizement that prompted him to make this adventure, but deep in his soul there was a higher and holier motive moving him to act, namely, a religious faith, and a desire to advance God's Church on earth. Besides opening up a new passage and a new country for Europe, he was intending with the gold and means obtained in this new country to fit out another expedition for the rescue of the holy places, and then through the conversion of the Saracens he hoped to win the world to God. That was the motive which stirred him, and that was the purpose he had in view.

His courage and perseverance won for him the first of his aims,—the discovery of a new country; but in the designs of God's providence, his work was to prove of far greater benefit to the world than the plans which he had conceived. He brought with him missionaries for the preaching of the Gospel to these distant people, and thus the Church was planted in the new world. Little

did he realize that his work instead of being for the rescue of the sacred places would be for something higher,—the rescue of races from darkness of error to the light of truth, and the planting of the Church in a country which would one day prove a marvel to the world. What a blessing to the world and religion has this discovery of Columbus proved!

In viewing this character, we find the same noble qualities of the knights. This, then, is the meaning of the titles which you have assumed as Knights of Columbus. These same qualities of character which stood forth so strikingly in the knights of old, and in the life of Columbus, are demanded of you at the present day. With this title of Knights and with this model of Columbus, there are duties incumbent upon you as members of this organization, equally significant and great as those fulfilled by the heroes of the past. It is not the rescue of the holy places—it is not a warfare in which you are called to engage, but it is something higher and nobler. As followers of Christ and as citizens of this nation, you have a duty of loyalty and devotion to religion and society in upholding the principles of truth, honesty, justice, and morality, against the evil teachings and the evil tendencies of a corrupt, selfish, and materialistic age. It is an age when, through the power of commercialism, materialistic standards of morality prevail. The value of wealth predominates over the value of man. The passion for wealth has so lowered the standard of moral principles that justice, honor, honesty and truth have no longer their high significance and value. Trusts, corporations, and combinations have made might appear right, have attempted to corrupt and control legislation and the courts have so corrupted justice, affected honesty, and

bartered away truth that confidence has been destroyed and the honor of the nation weakened. As a result of this passionate greed for wealth, countless evils exist which threaten society,—namely,—dissipation, love of ease and comfort, immorality, the desecration of the married life by divorce, and the disregard for the rights of others. These evils have become so pronounced that socialism and anarchy seek to relieve society. The discontentment on the part of the laborers, the distinction of classes by the rich growing richer, and the poor becoming poorer,—the overreaching and the taking advantage of the necessities of the people, only aggravate the situation.

Not only in commercial life but in public life this spirit of selfish greed and self-seeking has entered. Public office is no longer a public trust, but an opportunity for self-emolument. Dishonesty and evil methods have so long prevailed that distrust and suspicion exist in the public mind even against the honest and faithful workers. Public confidence in the honesty of men is weakened. In the family life, we hear so much of the evils of divorce and the corruption of that sacred state that we are shocked and scandalized by the revelations of the divorce court. Courageous men arise here and there to stem the tide of these evils. Valiant leaders of the Government seek to offset these corrupting influences. Public opinion has frequently been stirred against these frightful conditions, and yet they continue to threaten and menace society.

The underlying spirit of all these evils is selfish greed and selfish interests. It is selfishness which causes men to ignore the rights of others, to plot and scheme for the control of wealth and power. It crushes out all finer

feelings and sentiments of honor. It blinds men to all other interests except their own. It cripples all self-sacrifice and kindly consideration for others. It weighs and examines every cause and movement before acting, to see what gain, benefit, or reward will accrue to it. It does nothing except for reward or pay. It sees nothing of value except what is measured by its own selfish standards. Such a spirit can never accomplish any good. It is too narrow to reach out beyond the little circle of its own existence. Such a spirit existing in the various branches of society, namely, in its commercial, social, and family life, must inevitably bring ruin and disaster.

We have seen what was the type of manhood developed in the age of chivalry, and what were the qualities of character illustrated in the knight. Self and selfish natures were ignored as ignoble, and in their place were planted the finer feelings of nobility of mind, kindly consideration for others, sympathy for suffering, fairness and honesty in dealing with others, and a willingness to sacrifice self and personal interests for the general good. This was the spirit which made heroes, which produced results, developed character, and, when a crisis arose, or the interest of religion and the welfare of society demanded their support, it was given with a willingness and generosity that knew no bounds and that sought not reward nor fame.

This, then, is the cause in which you are called to enlist. The interest of religion and the welfare of society demand that you should make some effort to offset the prevailing evils of society. However, no real reform, no ameliorations of these conditions can be effected unless you show in your own lives and principles of conduct the spirit and principles which you would

inculcate in others. Be men, then, of pure lives, upright, high-minded and noble, by living up to the teachings of your Faith. This is the first duty of loyalty to Christ and His Church. Whatever affects or concerns the welfare of the Church, show a deep and active interest by rallying to her defense and listening to the exhortations of your Bishop. It is to an organization such as yours that the Church naturally looks for zealous and encouraging support. Otherwise, for what purpose are you members of this Catholic organization? Surely it is not for social purposes and pleasure, not for mere companionship, nor for the insurance benefit (important as this latter is) that you are members. These things alone can not keep your interest alive nor hold you together for any considerable length of time.

There ought to be something nobler and higher in your aims. The very name of your organization—Knights of Columbus—should signify for you and inspire you with loyalty and devotion to the Church. It is true that you have already shown some generosity of spirit in the cause of charity and Catholic education. These works more than anything else have brought honor and glory to your organization. But why rest content with this? There is still a great work to be accomplished in behalf of poor, neglected and orphan children. The success already achieved only enhances the value and amount of the work to be done, and proves the necessity of its establishment. But in this as in every charitable work, what is required is not the mere giving of money, but the giving of one's self. It is the active personal interest that counts and that achieves results. As has been pointed out to you, one of the most sacred duties of the knights of old, a duty which they bound themselves by oath to

fulfil, was the care of the poor, the widows and orphans. It is true that your society is not a charitable organization, but there ought to be something of a religious and charitable aim in your efforts, to lift you up from a mere social existence, and incite you to something higher and nobler for the good of your fellow-men, for the cause of religion, and for the welfare of society. As citizens you certainly should have also the welfare of society at heart and become interested in all that makes for its moral uplift and amelioration. But in this as in every good cause, you must be actuated by the highest principles. If you would hope to achieve any good or offset the evils of the present day which affect society, you must be moved to act by the spirit of unselfishness and generous self-sacrifice. You must not be self seekers, namely, seeking your own interest, or weighing the advantages, benefits, or rewards before acting. But whenever any good and important cause appeals to you, you should be influenced to act only from pure and unselfish motives.

In public life, whatever position you may hold let it be for the highest and best interests of society and not for your own self-aggrandizement or material welfare. Too long has this spirit prevailed. Stand for what is right, honorable and true, no matter what the cost or sacrifice. Here is where true courage is shown against corruption, dictation and human respect. Here is where society needs your best efforts. Wherever there is bribery, corruption, graft, dishonesty, unfaithful service, abuse of power, the thwarting of justice, the desecration of the ballot, the ignoring of civic duties and civic virtues, there is your duty as citizens. To a man, stand against such evils! Raise your voice in thundering protest against

such evils and take the necessary legitimate measures to repress them! In commercial life, wherever there is dishonesty, injustice, deceit, corrupt and over-reaching methods, let your protest be heard, and your influence be felt. Stand fairly and squarely against these evil practices. But first of all, be just, be honest and fair in your dealings and business relationships with others. Let not the low standards of others influence you! No matter what others may do—no matter what the majority may say, right is right, and wrong is wrong. Be men, valiant and courageous for justice, honesty and truth. It is only by such strong and determined efforts that might will not be right, and justice, truth and honesty will prevail.

But you may say the effort is hopeless against such opposition and against such odds, and that it is impossible to do this single-handed and alone. Selfishness, cowardice, and weakness can never accomplish these things, but courage, self-sacrifice, and uprightness,—nobility of mind and perseverance can. Did not Columbus, almost single-handed and alone, and against all opposition, succeed in winning his cause and accomplishing his aims by his sincerity, his courage, and his perseverance? Did not Daniel O'Connell, Windthorst, Ozanam, Garcia Moreno, and many others whose names are emblazoned on the pages of history, single-handed and against every opposition, succeed in winning the public cause for which they labored, by reason of their persevering efforts, undaunted courage, and generous self-sacrifice? May there not be among your members some leader, some noble soul, undaunted and fearless, who is ready to step forth into the breach, and rally you round the standard of Columbus in the cause of truth, justice, and holiness, to

contend against these evils and inspire men with right principles for the welfare of society? In the family life, there are duties likewise to be fulfilled in contending against the evil influences of this selfish, materialistic age. The effect of these influences is to destroy the simplicity and sacredness of the home life by extravagance, lavish display of wealth and dress, and excessive pleasure and dissipation. Be not led to excesses—live not beyond your means. Be frugal, but not parsimonious and niggardly. Be not extravagant. Live not for mere display or for excessive pleasures and dissipation. Have a higher, nobler, holier purpose in life than mere pleasure. Men seem to lose sight of the higher things in this life, and to be concerned only with amassing wealth—that they may enjoy ease, comfort and pleasure. What is needed to offset these evils is to ignore self and selfish interests—to have high-minded and noble purposes, to be actuated with noble principles and high resolves, to be ready to sacrifice one's self for the good of others. Is there a cause in which your order is engaged for the welfare of the Church and society? Be not inactive. Show by your presence your interest. Help the cause by your enthusiasm and efforts. Uphold the hands of your leaders. Let not sloth, indifference or carping criticism creep in to destroy the cause, but be up and doing. Here are your duties. In this you will show the qualities of the Knights of old,—you will be worthy of the name of Columbus and accomplish great things for God, for the Church, and your country.

JOSEPH G. ANDERSON.



