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### **Equestrian Order ~ Knights & Ladies of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem Confirmation and the Apostolic Mission of the Faithful**

St. Paul ~ Minneapolis

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Your Excellencies, Most Reverend Archbishops and Bishops  
Father Abbots  
Reverend Monsignors and Fathers,  
Esteemed Consecrated Religious,  
My dear Brother Knights, Dear Ladies  
Friends in Christ all,

Our Lieutenant, His Excellency Knight Commander George Zirnhelt has honored me by inviting me to address to you, this morning, a few words of teaching and encouragement. These conferences in recent years have been the occasion for us to meditate on the sublime mysteries of our faith, and the challenges the Church faces in the midst of our culture. Bishop Michael Sheridan spoke to us two years ago on the Holy Eucharist. Last year Archbishop Flynn taught about the beautiful Sacrament of Reconciliation. This morning I would like to address to you a few words on another Sacrament: Confirmation, the Gift of the Holy Spirit given in a way that completes our Baptism and calls us to be witnesses to Christ, and active participants in the Apostolic Mission of the Church.

As a bishop I get many occasions to reflect on this Sacrament. I dare say there are at least several hundred hours a year that bishops are engaged in some way with the preparation and celebration of this Sacrament. I suppose we ought to be experts at it, but I'm still learning.

But you are also called to live in this Sacrament every day. It is important for you to reflect upon your call, specifically as a result of the Gift of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation, to grow in holiness and be apostles of Christ and stewards of His grace for the transformation of the world. If it happens that somehow as a Catholic you or some adult member of your family didn't get confirmed, talk to your pastor. As Catholics we truly need this Sacrament and shouldn't try to live our life without this Divine assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Pope John Paul II, in connection with the Jubilee in 2000, spoke frequently of the New Springtime of the Church, the Springtime of the New Evangelization. I firmly believe there are hopeful signs around us of an awakening of Faith in the life of the Church.

The enthusiasm of millions of young people at World Youth Days, increases in vocations to priesthood and Consecrated life, the growth of movements such as Focolare, Neo Catechumenal Way, Faith and Light, and Communion and Liberation: These and many positive local initiatives are indications that the Church is experiencing new growth and enthusiasm.

At the same time, there remain difficult and negative forces at work – secularism, materialism

and relativism seem not to be declining. The terrible conflicts in the Middle East, including those in beloved Palestine, are striking reminders of the power of evil that does not go away. Both realities – wheat and weeds, darkness and light – death and life in Christ – are present side by side. We know there will be significant clashes ahead between “the Culture of Death,” and the faithful of the Church commissioned to construct “a civilization of life and light.” Because of the promise of ultimate victory in Jesus Christ, we have hope.

Today I wish to speak about what I firmly believe is the significant responsibility and the authentic vocation of the laity – to be active, vibrant agents of the Gospel precisely within the context of the secular world. The Sacrament of Confirmation calls us to be apostles in this way. We, the clergy, must do with zeal and fortitude what is proper to our state in the Church. The laity must do with zeal and fortitude what is proper to their state in the Church.

I suggest to you today that there is a healthy segregation of responsibilities of clergy and lay faithful that the mystery of the Church preserves. Conformity with these proper roles makes possible a dynamic complementarity, necessary for the spread of the Kingdom of Christ throughout the earth. I would say quite simply that if we do not each do our own part the work will not be accomplished.

The sheer number of people, all of whom need to hear the Gospel of Christ, requires that a broad apostolic activity – with its foundation in holiness - be unleashed which makes best use of the lay state. The 1988 Post-Synodal Document, *Christifideles Laici, On the Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People*, spoke of an “essential and irreplaceable role in evangelization” which is proper to the laity, for through them, Pope John Paul II says, “the Church of Christ is made present in the world.” (CL no. 7)

The lay faithful are vital to the protection and renewal of marriage and family life. The realms of law and politics, journalism and media, technology and science, business and trades: All these areas of expertise make up the field of the world and require the apostolic works of the lay faithful.

We are called – as an expression of our Baptism, Confirmation, and communion in the Holy Eucharist, to grow in holiness and to be participants in the apostolic mission of the Church. As a leaven in the dough, the lay faithful must completely infiltrate the workplace, the marketplace, the Crossroads of the world. Yeast works from the inside. It is not icing on top. It has the goal of causing the whole mass of dough to rise.

The life of God the Holy Trinity is infused into us and transforms us in Baptism and through the workings of sanctifying grace we become instruments of holiness. Grace moves us “from the inside out,” causing us to become living witnesses of faith, hope and charity made manifest in the world. Without grace – without the life and love of God – the transformation which the Gospel announces cannot happen. It is not our mere human talents and efforts that ultimately change the world. We need the help of the Holy Spirit – the same Holy Spirit who came upon the apostles in the Upper Room on Pentecost and caused them to put aside their fear and go out to courageously preach the Gospel.

In Confirmation we are strengthened with a Gift of the Holy Spirit to make us witnesses to Jesus Christ for the sake of the world. Lay men and women find themselves uniquely inserted into the world. Carrying Jesus Christ into the context of your ordinary duties and in the circumstances of your everyday life, the lay faithful, individually and collectively, and in union with the

Pope, bishops and clergy, contribute substantively, according to the words of Vatican II's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, to "the evangelization and sanctification of men and to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through their daily work. (Apostolicam Actuositatem, no. 2)

If we take this role seriously, we cannot help but be more convinced than ever of the vital importance of a Christian presence in the Holy Land . Though it is not primarily the practice of Christians/Catholics in Palestine to proselytize or win Muslims or Jews to Christianity, (though we need not rule this out) the power of the Gospel resides in the very presence of the Church.

The witness of these Christian communities, even as they share in the Cross of Jesus Christ, has a power to change hearts. Faith tells us the perseverance of the Christian Communities, like the tiny mustard seed, or a bit of leaven, will continue to be used by God to soften the hatred of their neighbors. But we cannot leave them alone. Our support is vital if they are to remain in the Land as witnesses to Jesus who lived and died in these very streets.

The Christian schools have the potential to be powerful instruments for the conversion of hearts. Their success is not to be determined necessarily by what percent of their students are Christian. Indeed, if the catholic identity of the schools remains strong, Muslim children in these schools will be formed in a Christian/Catholic milieu, and can become ambassadors for reconciliation. The hope and joy of Christians under such difficult conditions is a testimony to the supernatural dimension of the Church. It is also and always a challenge to us to do more to help them keep a home in the Holy Land .

I recently came across the account of a priest who was sent on mission to Kazakhstan , part of the former Soviet Union, and a very desolate part of Kazakhstan at that. He was alone. He was on his own, and the people around him had very little sense of God. They did not know Christ. They were not familiar with the Bible, the Liturgy or the Church. So what does he do? Where and how does he start?

This man realized that Christ was unknown. No one had any idea who Christ was or how He was supposed to fit into their life. He said he had to rethink his Catholic Faith. He had to ask himself, "Why am I here?" He didn't throw away all he had learned. He didn't forget the Scriptures, the Catechism, or the largeness of the Church as the living Body of Christ. But he had to try to figure out again how and why these things made a daily difference in his life so that he could begin with this starting point in mind.

Imagine yourself in that position. It is up to you to make Jesus Christ known. As you encounter others, realize there is no one you can send them to: No priest or deacon or Religious Sister or Brother, no RCIA, no prayer group – it is up to you.

And God has chosen you for this task. You can't say like some of the Old Testament prophets: I am too young; I am too old; I don't know enough; I've made too many mistakes in my life. No, assume that God has chosen you.

Everyday you are in such a circumstance – in the world – to be a witness to Christ, to a world that is hungry and thirsty for the way, the truth and the life. In this world which has today been called Post-Christian, the ravages of materialism and secularism cause people to either forget about God or make him a very peripheral part of their life. In real and trying ways their lives may be in total disarray. They have no sense of who they are or where they are going. We en-

counter these people in the workplace, on the phone. We receive their emails. We share the road with them. How can we possibly make our faith in Jesus Christ real to them? Indeed it is a supernatural task and requires the Wisdom, Understanding, and Fortitude: Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Because of your Baptism, you have God's life – faith hope and love – within you. By Confirmation you have been – not just called – but empowered to be a witness for Christ. At any given moment – you may be the one and only one who is able to show those around you the person who has the power to save them. You are the Apostle. What do you do? Do you accept your challenge? Do you accept your calling? At this moment if you don't do it, the person sitting next to you on the plane or walking through the grocery store, or even the person who lives next door to you, won't know Christ.

This may seem a bit contrived, but within it is an important fact that pertains to our Confirmation. God has called us, and has given us the help of the Holy Spirit to make the present moment grace-filled. The Person that we know is none other than Jesus Christ. (He is the One that you and I would want to be giving this talk this morning. For now, instead you have me.) So be it! But yes, He is the One. He is the Son of God. He died and rose from the dead. He holds the very keys of life and death. He must be known by every man, woman and child. How do we communicate this truth and gift, our faith, to others in a way that shows them true light in Christ? The first task may be for us to come to know Christ better ourselves. In what ways do we come to know Him?

We have the Faith that has been shared with us. We have the Church. The Gift of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation increases our faith and deepens our initiation into the Church. Christ at the Last Supper promised the Holy Spirit to the Apostles: to preserve the Church in truth and remind them of all He had said and done. Like a mother, the Church teaches us and forms us, but at some point she sends us out.

We have the Sacred Scriptures. The Word of God has to take root in our heart so that we can not merely read it or quote it to others, but make it come alive in our life. What does the birth of Jesus mean for our salvation? What did Christ accomplish by His Resurrection? How do we grasp the meaning of the Beatitudes? We pray and meditate on these revealed mysteries of Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit.

We have the Church's Liturgy and the life of the Sacraments. By them we are renewed and fortified. In the Mass we stand beneath the Cross of Christ, we breathe in the life of the Holy Spirit. We hand over our sacrifices and sufferings to the Father with Christ. We eat and drink the very Body and Blood of Christ as the elixir and foretaste of eternal life. Our sins are forgiven in Confession, and our souls are healed. These things make the difference in our life, or they don't.

But then, all of a sudden, we are out in Kazakhstan again, and people around us need our testimony to faith. They need Christ. You are the Apostle. Don't run away. Don't expect someone else to do it. You have to try your best to bring supernatural faith, hope, and charity into this situation. Honesty must prevail. Patience and trust must win out. We must look with eyes of love and not prejudice. We want to learn to see each other person as the son or daughter of God. It is quite a challenge. Come Holy Spirit!

I would suggest that the best preparation for this moment is to build up our "Confirmation mus-

cle” today. Though we have received the Gift of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation we may not be inclined to rely on Him. The grace of God builds on our human nature and perfects us as we go about the work of building and exercising our Spiritual life.

What is your plan of life?

What place do you give Holy Mass? Every Sunday and Holy Day, yes of course. What about other days? Is there a chapel where we can go and adore Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament? Putting our Lord first allows other things to find their proper place.

What about our sense of inner repentance? Do we examine our conscience every night before we go to bed? How often do we go to Confession? It is so neglected. If we are serious about growing spiritually we have to use this sacrament frequently. In Confession, we can ask advice about working on our sins and building virtue.

Do we read the Bible – even five minutes a day? Do we read the lives of the saints; the writings of the Fathers of the Church – or other classics of the spiritual life? Are we studying and seeking to internalize the writings of the Magisterium? Do we guard against reading dissenting books and periodicals?

What about our prayer? The Rosary and other devotional practices: the Divine Mercy Chaplet, the Stations of the Cross can keep us on track. Mary, our Guardian angel, our patron saints help us to come to Christ more faithfully.

We also must spend time each day in mental prayer – reflecting on the mysteries of Christ’s life, the Gospels, the articles of the Creed, our call as a son or daughter of God. We must become contemplatives, people who are thirsty for Christ in prayer if we are going to be ready to be missionaries in the world.

The 20th century Spanish Saint Josemaria Escriva, founder of Opus Dei, was visiting with a group of French bishops toward the end of the Second Vatican Council. One of them remarked that it is the role of the laity to infuse the structures of the temporal order with a Christian spirit in order to transform them. “If they have a contemplative soul, Your Excellency!” Monsignor Escriva replied with a smile, “If they have a contemplative soul! Otherwise they won’t transform anything. Rather, they will be the ones transformed, and instead of Christianizing the world, the Christians will become worldly.” (de Prada, vol. III , p. 340)

We can begin to be more spiritual people when we do our daily work with a growing awareness of the Presence of God with us at all times. We must keep and cultivate this Spirit of recollection in Christ, otherwise when we are suddenly faced with a big challenge, or an opportunity to bring Christ to someone, we will lose our serenity, failing to recall that He is with us.

We devote these days of our Order’s Meeting each year to a reflection on the needs of the Holy Land where our Savior lived and died. If we have had the opportunity to visit there some of these realities of His life may have become more deeply embedded in our heart. But you and I must find Jesus Christ everywhere. The magnificent words of the Council, the Church in the Modern World, remind us that “By His Incarnation the Son of Man has united Himself in some way with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, and loved with a human heart.” (GS 22)

You and I, through the grace of our Confirmation, have been granted the privilege and responsibility to be His witnesses in the world: whether it is in our home or daily workplace, the corridors of this Hotel in Minneapolis, in Kazakhstan or Palestine. We must find Him, know Him, and love Him, so that by the power and help of the Holy Spirit we can bring Him to others.

Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit., Queen and Mother of us all; Pray for us.

God Bless you.