BLESSED MICHAEL MCGIVNEY

Last Saturday, on the eve of All Saints, Father Michael McGivney was beatified in a ceremony at St. Joseph Cathedral in Hartford, Connecticut after a miracle attributed to his intercession was approved by Pope Francis.

Blessed Father McGivney was born in Waterbury, Connecticut on August 12, 1852 to his parents, both immigrants from Ireland. (Waterbury is featured in Ken Burn's documentary on World War II as representative of those towns which sent their children to war.) His father worked in one of the brass mills that was the city's major industry. The oldest of thirteen children, six of whom died early in life, he joined his father at the mill as a spoon maker. He entered seminary studies at the age of 16 but had to leave to help support his siblings after his father died. Later, he was able to resume his studies at St. Mary Seminary in Baltimore and was ordained on December 22, 1873 by Archbishop James Gibbons.

When he began his work as a parish priest in the Church of St. Mary in New Haven, Father McGivney was acutely sensitive to the plight of many immigrant families that suffered the death of a household's breadwinner. At the time, labor unions and many of the popular fraternal organizations which provided help to the needy generally excluded Catholics. Likewise, Catholics were forbidden by the Church to join groups like the Freemasons that were virulently anti-Catholic. It was a time in the United States described as the "Golden Age of Fraternalism" and McGivney conceived and founded a fraternal organization of the men in the parish first to provide help to widows and orphans and then to encourage Catholic men in their American Catholic identity. He chose Christopher Columbus as the patron of the organization as a rebuke to the many "wasp-ish" organizations that claimed the Italian-born Catholic explorer for their own.

The new organization required men to be Catholics in good standing, sober. (Liquor sellers were not invited to join.) There were to be "Catholic gentlemen and Knights of Columbus [who] should be regarded as exemplars of virtue, not aberrations from the dominant Protestant model of manhood." (Koehlinger, Amy; Winter 2004), "Let Us Live for Those Who Love Us: Faith, Family, and the Contours of Manhood among the Knights of Columbus in Late Nineteenth-Century Connecticut". (*Journal of Social History*.38) It was then the only fraternal organization in the United States that welcomed African-American members.

After spending seven years at St. Mary Parish, Father McGivney was appointed pastor of St. Thomas Church in Thomaston, Connecticut in 1884. He died from pneumonia in the midst of the worldwide 1889-90 flu pandemic on August 14, 1890.

If as Christ told us (Matthew 13:8), that good seed of the sort which comes from holy lives will bear fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold, then Father McGivney's holiness is undoubted. The Knights of Columbus has grown in its outreach to provide insurance benefits to families in the event of an untimely death, supported the Church in her many charitable tasks over the years and throughout the world, and assisted parishes locally, including and especially here at St. Marianne Cope Parish, the Churches of St. Thomas of Canterbury and St. Joseph.

Blessed Father Michael McGivney, pray for us!