

Formation and Spirituality

“Come and See: Invitation, Fraternity and Mission”

By Fr Julian Belich

Brothers, good morning.

I am only a simple parish priest, and these are simply some thoughts—perhaps even ramblings—offered without much expertise. I hope they may help us reflect together on the Scriptures before us today and on our calling as Knights.

The State Object asks us: “To foster the Christian way of life throughout the Nation.” That is a great and important mission. But perhaps it begins in a very simple way: one Christian inviting another person to encounter Christ, to belong, to pray, to serve and to grow in faith.

The prophet Isaiah says:

***“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”
(Isaiah 2:3)***

Notice that it is an invitation: **“Come, let us go.”** Faith is not simply a private matter between myself and God. Certainly, faith is personal, and each of us must respond freely to God’s grace. But we are also called into a people. We walk together. We encourage one another. We learn the ways of the Lord together.

The Catechism teaches that the desire for God is written in the human heart, because we are created by God and for God. God never stops drawing every person to himself, and only in God do we find the fullness of truth and happiness for which we search.
(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 27)

It seems to me that we are living through a kind of crisis. Not necessarily because people have stopped seeking happiness, love, friendship, healing or meaning. I think those desires are still very strong. But many people may no longer know where to look, whom to trust, or whether the Church and its organisations will really welcome them.

I have been noticing that new gyms seem to be opening everywhere. Why do people join them? I answer, often, they see someone they know change: a friend, a family member or a work colleague becomes healthier, happier, stronger or more confident. They see that person’s life improving and think, “Perhaps I could do that too.”

People may first join a gym because they see a possible benefit. They hope to improve their health, lose weight, gain strength, become more disciplined or feel better about themselves. But what keeps them coming is often more than the gym equipment or the membership card. It is encouragement. It is friendship. It is having someone notice them. It is a trainer who says, “Keep going,” or another member who says, “We missed you last week.”

And, of course, the opposite can happen. If there is no welcome, no support, no friendship and no sense of belonging, people can easily stop coming.

Perhaps the same can be said of many groups, including Catholic organisations. People may initially join because they perceive some benefit. But they remain when that benefit becomes real—when they experience fraternity, service, prayer, encouragement and a sense of purpose.

In the Gospel, Nathanael is doubtful when Philip tells him about Jesus: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip does not argue with him. He does not give him a long explanation. He simply says:

“Come and see.”
(John 1:46)

This is a beautiful model for evangelisation and for membership invitation. We do not have to answer every question. We do not need to have a perfect explanation for everything. We do not need to pretend that we or our organisations are perfect.

We can simply say: **“Come and see.”**

Come and see our prayer.
Come and see our friendship.
Come and see our service.
Come and see men trying to live their Catholic faith.
Come and see an Order that supports parishes, priests, families and those in need.

But this also raises an important question: **What will people actually see if they come?**

Will they see an Order that is welcoming? Will they see Brothers who care for each other? Will they see prayer? Will they see kindness and a willingness to serve? Will they see joy in faith? Or will they see stress, arguments, division, complaints and too much concern about structures, money or positions?

Finances, governance and organisation matter. We have responsibilities, and we should carry them out properly. But they cannot be the heart of what we are. The heart must be Christ.

The Catechism teaches that the Church is a people called together in unity by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (CCC, 810) We are not meant to be isolated Christians. God brings us together. The first Christians devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. (Acts 2:42)

The Acts of the Apostles gives us a powerful picture of Christian life:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”
(Acts 2:42)

And later:

“All who believed were together and had all things in common.”
(Acts 2:44)

This does not mean that every Christian community will look identical. But it does tell us that faith, prayer, fellowship and practical care for one another belong together.

The Catechism also speaks about the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The evidence of Christian life is not merely what we say, but what begins to grow in us through grace:

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”
(Galatians 5:22–23; see CCC, 1832)

These are not simply nice words. They are evidence. They are what people see when the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of Christians.

When someone comes into a parish, a Branch or a Knights gathering, they may not first notice our procedures, constitutions or reports. But they will notice whether we are kind. They will notice whether we are peaceful or anxious, welcoming or closed, generous or self-centred, united or divided.

Jesus himself gave this as a sign of discipleship:

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
(John 13:35)

There is an old phrase attributed to the early Christians: **“See how they love one another.”** Whether people understand all our traditions or not, they understand love, kindness, patience and friendship.

People are also very perceptive. We cannot simply treat people as numbers to solve a membership problem. They will know. There is a saying: “You can fool some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time.”

So perhaps our first responsibility is to care for the real people who are already among us. Not imaginary people we hope will join one day, but the Brothers we already have: those who are elderly, sick, grieving, isolated, tired or carrying personal burdens.

A phone call can matter. A visit can matter. A prayer can matter. Asking someone, “How are you really?” can matter. Offering practical help can matter.

The Letter to the Hebrews says:

“Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.”
(Hebrews 10:24–25)

That is fraternity. It is not simply attending the same meeting. It is encouraging one another in love and good works.

Some Church organisations suffer from burnout, lack of support and too much focus on worldly affairs. The Knights are not immune from these pressures. All of us can become tired. We can become caught up in administration, finances, documents and concerns about numbers.

Again, these things matter, but they must remain servants of the mission, not become the mission itself.

At the centre must be prayer, the sacraments, friendship, service and personal holiness. The Catechism reminds us that the Holy Spirit gives different gifts to the faithful for the building up of the Church. (CCC, 798–801; see also 1 Corinthians 12:4–7)

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord.”
(1 Corinthians 12:4–5)

Not everyone will serve in the same way. Some Brothers may be strong in practical service. Some may be organisers. Some may pray quietly and faithfully. Some may be good at welcoming others. Some may be able to visit the sick. Some may support a parish priest. Some may be mentors for younger men. All these gifts are needed.

There is also, in my humble opinion, a perception in society that Church (religious) groups/organisations can be rigid, closed, secretive or difficult to approach. That perception may not always be fair, but it is real, and we need to take it seriously.

Tradition is important. It gives us identity, history and strength. But tradition should draw people closer to Christ, rather than becoming an unnecessary barrier. We should not abandon our Catholic identity in order to welcome others. Rather, if we are truly Catholic—prayerful, charitable, faithful and fraternal—we should become more welcoming.

I witnessed this, last Saturday, here, was cold and raining. Yet there were crowds of children playing sport in parks, with parents and grandparents standing in the cold and wet under umbrellas. Why do they do that? There are many reasons. Children need to run, play, learn, improve and make friends. Parents find purpose in supporting them. Families get to know other families. People find community.

In our society, sporting clubs increasingly provide friendship, belonging and a local network. The cultural religious supports of the past are no longer as strong. We cannot assume that people will automatically come to Church or to Catholic organisations simply because they always have.

But we should not be discouraged. Those sporting fields show that people still desire community. They will still make sacrifices for their children, friends and a shared purpose. The desire to belong has not disappeared.

And if society is becoming more secular, how do we explain the proliferation of charities and people who volunteer to help those in need? In my experience, people generally love helping others, especially the poor, the sick and the vulnerable. People want to do good. They want to contribute. Often, however, they need an accessible way to do so.

This may be an opportunity for the Knights. We have something important to offer: a fraternity of Catholic men who pray, serve, support clergy and parishes, care for each other and put their faith into action.

We need to meet people where they are. We need to make it easy for them to see what the Knights do, to meet real Brothers, to participate in service, and to discover that Catholic faith is not simply a set of rules. It is a living relationship with Jesus Christ, lived personally and communally.

The Catechism teaches that the sacraments are effective signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, through which divine life is given to us. (CCC, 1131) A sacramental life is not an escape from the world; it is how Christ transforms us so that we can serve the world more faithfully.

When we pray, go to Mass, receive the sacraments and seek God's grace, that grace should bear fruit in the way we treat people. It should make us more patient, kinder, humbler and more generous.

The New Testament is encouraging because it does not hide the weaknesses of the disciples. The Apostles did not understand everything immediately. They made mistakes. They were sometimes fearful, competitive and slow to believe. Yet Jesus was patient. He called them, formed them, corrected them and sent them out.

That should give us hope. Not every initiative will work. Not every group will last forever. Some groups may have their particular time, mission and purpose. But the human heart's longing for love, acceptance, healing and the good life will remain.

The Psalmist expresses this longing:

“As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”
(Psalm 42:1–2)

Ultimately, every human longing for goodness, friendship, healing and belonging points towards God.

For many of the Brothers here, another important area of mission is family, especially grandchildren. Grandparents can have a remarkable influence on the life of faith. They can pray with their grandchildren, speak naturally about God, share their experience of faith, take them to Mass, show them love and be a stable, faithful presence.

Saint Paul speaks warmly of Timothy’s faith, which first lived in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. (2 Timothy 1:5) That is a powerful reminder that faith is often handed on through family relationships, daily witness and love.

Many young people may not remember every religious instruction they receive. But they will remember a grandparent who prayed for them, took an interest in them, was gentle with them and showed that faith made a real difference.

This too is “Come and see.”

It is not only an invitation made by words. It is an invitation made through a faithful life.

So, Brothers, perhaps our task is simple.

Let us pray.
Let us remain close to the sacraments.
Let us seek personal holiness.
Let us care for the Brothers already entrusted to us.
Let us be kind to one another.
Let us serve those in need.
Let us welcome people honestly and warmly.
Let us trust that the Holy Spirit can work through our small efforts.

And let each of us consider one Catholic man—a son, grandson, neighbour, friend, parishioner or colleague—to whom we might say:

“Come and see.”

Not: “Come because we need numbers.”

Not: “Come because we have everything worked out.”

But: “Come and see a group of Catholic men who are trying, imperfectly but sincerely, to pray, serve, grow in faith and care for one another.”

Discussion Questions

- Considering Isaiah 2:3, how can we better “walk together” as Brothers in faith and service?
- Who is one Catholic man whom I could personally invite to “come and see” the Knights, as Philip invited Nathanael in John 1:46?
- If a new man attended a Branch meeting or event, what would he see, hear and experience?
- How can our branches better show the fruits of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness—in practical ways? *(Galatians 5:22–23)*
- What can we do to care more intentionally for Brothers who are elderly, ill, isolated, grieving or tired?
- How can grandparents and older members hand on faith naturally through their relationships with children and grandchildren? *(2 Timothy 1:5)*
- What is one small and practical action our local gathering can take this month to become more welcoming, visible and connected to parish life?