

# Knights Report Membership Increase

**Detroit** — The Knights of Columbus reached a record high this year in the number of members and councils, according to a report to the 92nd annual meeting of the Supreme Council.

Supreme Knight John R. McDevitt said 21,818 new members joined during fiscal

1974, and noted that the gain was almost twice that of 1973, which totaled 11,426. There are 1,185,774 members and 5,873 councils, he said. McDevitt attributed the upswing to "dedicated and militant faith," and to K of C leadership in various fields.

In his annual report last

Wednesday and in a dinner speech, McDevitt spoke of abortion, pornography and, in general, "a tidal wave of neopaganism" which he said was sweeping the nation.

He declared that "there must be no letup in our efforts to educate the public on the inhumanity of killing the unborn" or to "confront our political representatives on this crucial moral issue."

"Unless the abortion trend can be reversed," McDevitt warned, "society will be pushed into a dead-end that necessarily must lead to institutions as horrible as the gas chambers at Dachau."

Turning to the issue of pornography, he questioned the spending of billions to fight environmental pollution while the "pollution of the mind" caused by "tidal waves of pornographic materials" grows worse.

Despite judicial rulings that have limited the power of local juries to interpret obscenity standards set down by the Supreme Court, McDevitt said he still sees "ample opportunity for the forces of decency to work for a clean moral environment."

The "testimony of a thoroughly Christian life" and not the "sophisticated religious argument" will spark a new spiritual vitality in the Catholic community, McDevitt predicted.

"Christians rose as a mighty force from the dark caverns of the catacombs and they can rise with renewed spiritual strength from the swamps of secularism" of the present age, he said.

"We know the faith will flourish as long as there are genuinely Catholic families who will nurture it in their own lives and spread it by word and example."

Calling for "added stress" on

programs of Christian formation within the Knights' councils, Mr. McDevitt said such programs are designed to develop "committed Christians so we can reform society around us."

The convention opened at St. Aloysius Church with a celebrated Mass that drew 2,000 delegates and guests from Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico and all parts of the United States. Homilist was Redemptorist Father Joseph E. Manton, a radio preacher and retreat master from

the Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Boston.

## WORD FOR SUNDAY

### From the Bible

**Sunday's Readings:** (R1) Sir. 3:17-18, 20, 28-29; (R2) Heb. 12:18-19, 22-24; (R3) Lk. 14:1, 7-14.

When I saw that the first reading for Sunday was from the book of Sirach (pronounced SIGH rak), it sparked a blaze of thoughts.

Sirach was a scribe. I never realized how important scribes were in the ancient Orient until I had read Verner Keller's book, *The Bible As History*. To understand their importance meant taking an excursion into the history of writing.

In the ancient world, the medium of written communication was by hieroglyphics, by cuneiform, and by alphabet. The Egyptians used hieroglyphics, which is picture writing. The Assyrians and the Babylonians used cuneiform, which consisted in making wedges in clay tablets. The wedges symbolized syllables or words. There were about 550 of these symbols. About 2,000 B.C. the Phoenicians discovered a simpler mode of expression — the alphabet. With little more than twenty letters, like the keys of a typewriter, one could make all kinds of words.

Even with this simplification, reading and writing were complex. Those who had mastered the art wielded great power. A chief scribe often ranked as the third man in a kingdom. This is no wonder since so much depended on him. Mighty conquerors and rulers of great commercial empires, who were often illiterate, needed the scribe and his school of other scribes. Letters had to be written. Annals kept. Business transactions contracted.

Though of low rank, scribes associated with men far above themselves. Since many court officials could neither read nor write, the scribe gained an advantage over them. He knew the score, for he had read the records or written them. Yet being of low rank, the scribe's greatest asset was prudence and humility. He had to know how to keep his mouth shut and how to keep his place. Hence Sirach advises, "My Son, conduct your affairs with humility, and you'll be loved more than the giver of gifts." — the powerful rich of higher rank. In training students, therefore, scribes had them copy out maxims. Like the McCuffey Reader, which imparted morality with learning, the young scribe learned common sense while learning his letters.

Wisdom Literature in the bible does not mean speculative or philosophic thought, as it did among Greeks and Romans. Biblical wisdom meant practical knowledge. A wise person is one skilled in his profession. Thus we might speak of a carpenter as wise, when we mean he is a good one. The wise man is not necessarily a great thinker, but

one who knows how to live, to make good. Dale Carnegie's book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* would have been classed as wisdom literature in the ancient world.

Jewish wisdom literature, however, differed from pagan wisdom in its religious orientation. The wisdom writers of Mesopotamia and Egypt felt the gods had little to do with their success. All men they believed were born fools; some became wise, some did not. To become wise, instruction was needed, and early in life. The purpose of wisdom literature was to instruct the young. All depended on that, not on the gods. But for Israel, the fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom.

The first part of Sunday's Gospel seems taken right out of wisdom literature. Another Jesus, much younger than Jesus ben Sira (Sirach), tells a parable of good manners. He offers some advice about how to act at a dinner party. He also encouraged humility simply for what one can get out of it. "This will win you the esteem of your fellow guests."

All well and good. We can see all those at table nodding their heads in approval. But Jesus was more than a wise man. He was also a prophet. With the searing tongue of a prophet He goes on to speak disturbing words: "Whenever you give a dinner, do not invite your friends only — those who can pay you back." This is shocking, not a wise saying! Not good manners! Common sense dictates, "Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours."

But this is the difference that comes with Christianity. The Jews gave pagan wisdom literature a religious twist; Jesus gave Jewish wisdom literature a supernatural twist. The Christian cannot be content with being humble just to "be loved more than the giver of gifts." He is to be humble, because he can then better identify with the poor and needy around him. He is to take the last place, not in the hope of winning "the esteem of your fellow guests," but because in the last place he will better be able to see himself in relationship with his God. He is to give generously, not in the hope of a reward here and now, but so that his reward will assuredly come hereafter.

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