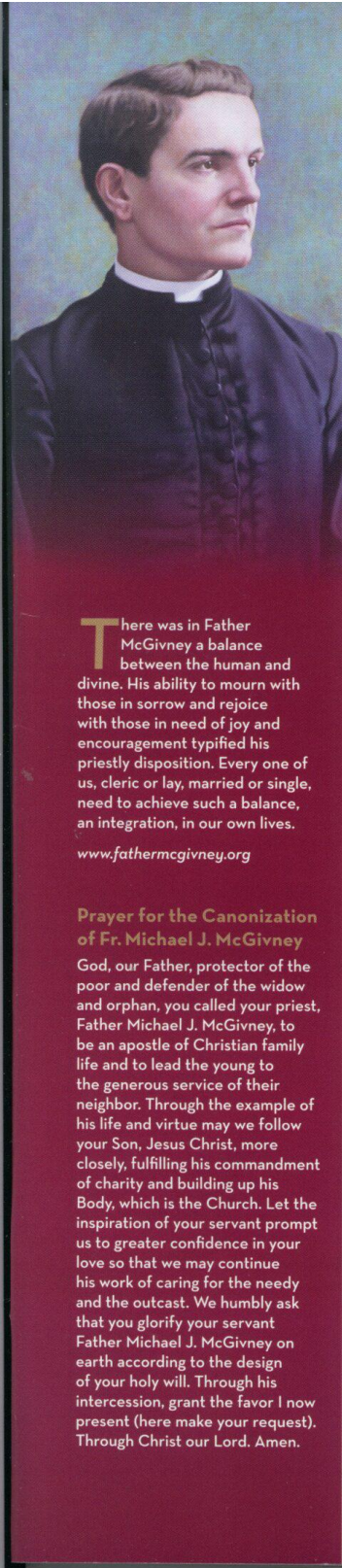


## Catechetical Saints

### THE VENERABLE FR MICHAEL MCGIVNEY



There was in Father McGivney a balance between the human and divine. His ability to mourn with those in sorrow and rejoice with those in need of joy and encouragement typified his priestly disposition. Every one of us, cleric or lay, married or single, need to achieve such a balance, an integration, in our own lives.

[www.fathermcgivney.org](http://www.fathermcgivney.org)

#### Prayer for the Canonization of Fr. Michael J. McGivney

God, our Father, protector of the poor and defender of the widow and orphan, you called your priest, Father Michael J. McGivney, to be an apostle of Christian family life and to lead the young to the generous service of their neighbor. Through the example of his life and virtue may we follow your Son, Jesus Christ, more closely, fulfilling his commandment of charity and building up his Body, which is the Church. Let the inspiration of your servant prompt us to greater confidence in your love so that we may continue his work of caring for the needy and the outcast. We humbly ask that you glorify your servant Father Michael J. McGivney on earth according to the design of your holy will. Through his intercession, grant the favor I now present (here make your request). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Fr. Michael McGivney is probably not familiar to most readers, unless they are connected to the Knights of Columbus. The Knights are known for their work for the poor, for Catholic education, and for the disabled.

I attended a conference sponsored by a non-religious organization that works with and for people with severe disabilities. One session, focused on independent living for people with developmental disabilities and the life of one individual was highlighted. It was noted that part of the success achieved by this man in living independently stemmed in part from the invitation of his neighbor to attend a meeting of the Knights of Columbus. He joined the organization, worked very hard in the projects sponsored by them, and eventually became a member of the Catholic Church. I was surprised that a state run organization would highlight the religious life of a client, but I was not surprised that the Knights played a role in the man's support group.

Michael McGivney was born in Connecticut in 1852, the oldest of twelve children. His parents had emigrated from Ireland. While America looked like a safe haven for the Irish, German, Italian, Polish, etc., their prosperity in there was often stymied by the fact that they were Catholic.<sup>1</sup>

McGivney was first educated at home, and then attended a school started by his pastor. He graduated early, and discerned a call to the priesthood. After he worked in a brass factory for three years, he entered the Jesuit seminary. When his father died, he returned to take care of his family until two of his younger sisters were able to take over. He then decided to apply for the Diocese of Hartford. His ordination was December 22, 1877, his first Mass on Christmas Day.

He immediately plunged into the life of being an assistant parish pastor. Two social maladies plagued his parishioners. The first was the rise of secret societies, clubs for men that met for all intents and purposes to provide for the betterment of society, but in fact provided a "respectable" venue for drinking. Catholics were forbidden to join these groups. However, the desire to fit in, as well as the greater desire to find a place to imbibe, inspired many Catholic men to join. The second was the anti-Catholic atmosphere of the country, particularly in the New England region. The famous sign posted on many places of work "No Irish Need Apply", could have read, "No Catholics Need Apply". Many of the immigrants were unemployed or underemployed, often taking dangerous jobs that no one else wanted. If one of these men died or was hurt, there was no social network to take care of the family, particularly if they were Catholic. Fr. McGivney desired to alleviate this.

In his short priestly life, he labored tirelessly both spiritually and socially. The way he preached and the beautiful way he decorated his church for feast days drew crowds. He was concerned about his parishioners belonging to these secret societies as well as their abuse of alcohol or the plight of his parishioners when illness, disability, or death befell them.

He organized socials and theatrical productions to provide a cultural outlet for his people. By 1882, he began, with some men of the parish an organization to provide benefits for needy Catholics. On March 29, 1882 the Knights of Columbus was recognized as a fraternal society by the State of Connecticut.

He was soon worn out by his priestly work, contracted influenza and pneumonia. He died at 38 on August 14, 1890. The Knights, now world-wide, have grown from a small group of men meeting in a church basement to over 13,000 councils and 1.7 million members.<sup>2</sup>

Fr. McGivney was a catechist because he was a priest totally immersed in the life of his parish, which included instructing all in the teachings of the Church, and encouraging them, through word and example what it means to be holy. In 1997, Archbishop Daniel Cronin opened diocesan investigation of the heroic virtue of Fr. McGivney. On March 15, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI declared Fr. McGivney "venerable".

As catechists, we are called to support, in a unique way, the pastoral efforts of the priests in whose parishes we serve. We are also called to promote vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life. May the Venerable Michael McGivney intercede for us.

For a complete work on the life of Fr. McGivney, see: Brinkley, Douglas; Julie M. Fenster. *Parish Priest: Father Michael McGivney and American Catholicism*. William Morrow Publishers.

#### Notes

1. "The story of Roman Catholicism in the nineteenth century IS the story of immigration. Until about 1845, the Roman Catholic population of the United States was a small minority of mostly English Catholics, who were often quite socially accomplished. But when several years of devastation potato famine led millions of Irish Catholics to flee the United States... the face of American Catholicism began to change drastically and permanently. In the space of fifty years, the Catholic population of the United States suddenly transformed from a tight-knit group of landowning, educated aristocrats into a diverse mass of urban and rural immigrants who came from many countries, spoke different languages, held different social statuses, and emphasized different parts of their Catholic heritage. Julie Byrne, department of Religion, Duke University. [www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org](http://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org)"
2. The Knights have been leaders in the Pro-Life movement as well as promoting vocations to the priesthood and religious life. They have also raised the money to repair the statues of the Apostles atop St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. For further information go to [www.kofc.org](http://www.kofc.org).

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