

Donohue Addresses N.Y. Police Holy Name Society Breakfast

By Karen Lynn Krugh

It was like St. Patrick's Day all over again. Just three days after the annual parade, nearly two thousand police officers, marching to the sound of bagpipes and bass drums, paraded down Fifth Avenue and into St. Patrick's Cathedral for the 76th Annual Mass and Communion Breakfast of the Holy Name Society of the Police Department of the City of New York. And waiting inside at the front of the Cathedral was Catholic League President William A. Donohue, who would have the honor of addressing the crowd at the breakfast later in the day. The morning began with a standing-room-only Mass at the Cathedral celebrated by Cardinal O'Connor. Fr. Philip Eichner, chair of the Catholic League board, was one of the concelebrants. During his homily, the Cardinal thanked the police officers for their dedication and willing service to the city and the citizens of New York. He related their work to the Gospel reading of the day in which Christ tells his followers, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life."

The analogy was clearly relevant to the everyday risks faced by police officers.

Following the Mass, the largest turnout of police officers in fifteen years again lined Fifth Avenue to march to the New York Hilton where the breakfast was held. When it came time for his introduction, it became clear that Dr. Donohue, the grandson of a New York City police officer, had a natural connection to the assembled officers.

His speech on anti-Catholicism began with quotes from academics, politicians and religious leaders. He referenced historical as well as contemporary occurrences of anti-Catholicism, including such incidents as the MTA's Madonna poster, the television programs "Picket Fences" and "The John Larroquette Show," speeches by spokespersons for the Nation of Islam and others. Dr. Donohue's speech was interrupted several times by spontaneous applause and peppered with laughter from the audience. Upon mentioning a recent incident in Georgia where a detective was suspended for a day after refusing to remove the ashes from his forehead on Ash Wednesday, many heads nodded in understanding. He had hit something very close to home – anti-Catholicism in law enforcement.

The gathering sat attentively while Dr. Donohue listed case after case of discrimination against Catholics. After a fiery delivery lasting more than twenty minutes, Dr. Donohue received a standing ovation from the enthusiastic crowd. In speaking with some of the officers later, they expressed to this writer their amazement at how enthralled the group had been. Many audience members went out of their way afterward to seek out Dr. Donohue and to show their support and enthusiasm for the work of the League. At a small reception immediately following the breakfast, Dr. Donohue received several other invitations to speak on anti-Catholicism in the area. Numerous other invitations were received in the national office during the week following the breakfast.

Accompanying Dr. Donohue were his wife Valerie, sister Tara and mother, Mrs. Anna Donohue, Board Chairman Fr. Philip Eichner and myself. Also present at the Mass and breakfast were William J. Bratton, New York City Police Commissioner; Peter Powers, Deputy Mayor of the City of New York; Peter Vallone, Speaker of the City of New York; Mark Green, Public Advocate; and the Staten Island and Bronx Borough Presidents, Guy V. Mollinari and Fernando Ferrer, among others. Chris Burke, the actor with Down syndrome from the series "Life Goes

On," was also in attendance with his father, a retired police officer. Cardinal O'Connor made a brief appearance and a touching speech at the breakfast.