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DDGM Talks

Talk Number 5

Topic: Our Ritual

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OUR RITUAL

In my first talk as DDGM back in September, at Perfection No. 616, I highlighted what I consider to be the four basic objectives of the Craft. These included fostering fellowship, providing education, developing virtue and fostering benevolence. To assist us in achieving these objectives we have what is known as our “ritual”.

Some people might think of the “ritual” as being simply a small black book that contains the protocol of Masonic meetings and the manner in which to conduct the three degrees. Others might think, and I’ve heard it said, the ritual is Masonry. Neither is totally accurate, and indeed neither is totally inaccurate. In reality a “Ritual” is the performance of a ceremony to illustrate a mystery. Society has many such rituals; shaking the hand of a friend, opening and holding the door for a lady, and saluting an officer by one of lower rank are but some examples. Although these are simple gestures or rituals, they each possess deeper meanings.

The Masonic ritual is neither a literal nor historical document, and one must understand that the stories and references in the ritual do not necessarily equate with absolute fact. It is rather a dramatic allegory to explain the tenets and principles of the Craft. It is intended to introduce a man into the brotherhood of men who believe in right and honourable thinking and action.

In essence, the ritual is a play and each Mason is a member of the cast. The ritualist ought to remember that he has placed himself in the position of a Master of the Craft to his apprentice. His responsibility, therefore is to convey the stories of the ritual to the candidate clearly and interestingly. He must have some empathy for what he is saying, for, when done properly, the degrees provide more light to a candidate than his eye can see.

The delivery of the work is of crucial importance. The general meaning of the ritual can be sensed in the feeling and flow of the words. The ritual shows antiquity and may appear archaic, but it is steeped in the history, beauty and clarity of language.

The facility with which we “perform” the ritual is therefore in our hands. As on the dramatic stage, the actor must be competent—know his lines, know when and where to emphasize, and deliver clearly in a voice audible to the audience in all corners of the Lodge. How many Lodges have lost members simply because the member could not hear the ritual being presented? A “Prompter” in the Lodge, is necessary just as it is on the regular stage, but each observable use of such, on the stage or in the Lodge, takes away from the “ideal performance”. Such “performances” do not just happen—they require hours of preparation but the benefit to the Master of the Craft and the candidate and indeed the total audience is ample reward for the effort extended.

But ritual, however well executed, is not an end in itself. The work must be sincere and, although accuracy is pleasing and precision can increase the impressiveness of the message the ritual is intended to convey, there must be communication. The right words can be pronounced, but it is of little avail unless the message comes across. It must impress the candidate and fill his mind with intelligent information and a desire for further enlightenment. The result of such teaching will be a candidate who will remain an active, interested member, who understands Masonry and who ultimately becomes a more mature individual.

“Who ultimately becomes a more mature individual.” --- that is the goal of Freemasonry---to make good men better. Proper use of our ritual will help this to be accomplished. Inefficient use of our ritual will cause our programme in the Lodge and the product that evolves therefrom to be deficient, and the whole fraternal chain is weakened as a result of poorly cast links.

The recap then, in a nutshell, the quality of ritual performed in a Lodge, is a significant factor in the success of a Lodge---not the only factor by a long shot, but a factor that we can do something about.

The following portion of a poem by Myra Welch symbolizes the benefit of a “Master’s touch” on the ritual in a Lodge---it’s entitled “The Touch of the Master’s Hand”.

‘Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while

To waste much time on the old violin,
But he held it up with a smile.
What am I bidden, good folks, he cried,
Who'll start the bidding for me?
A dollar, a dollar; then two! Only two?
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?
Three dollars, once, three dollars twice;
Going for three.....But no,
From the room, far back, a grey-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then, wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening the loosened strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet
As a carolling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said, "What am I bid for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.
A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
Three thousand, once, three thousand, twice;
And going and gone, said he.
The people cheered, but some of them cried,
We do not quite understand
What changed its worth? Swift came the reply:
"The touch of a Master's hand!"

Dufferin Lodge No. 338, it my earnest hope that your brethren like Bro. Larry Moore, will be able to give our ritual "the touch of a Master's hand". If they can, I feel certain your Lodge will thrive in the coming years as it has indeed been doing since 1876.