



The Florida Knight

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Right Eminent Grand Commander 2020

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Greetings Sir Knights,

It seems the rest of the country is starting to cool off as we approach the “Winter” months, but we here in Florida (at least South Florida) are still experiencing the heat of Summer. As all of you are aware, October is the month in the year 1307 when Templars around France were rounded up and put into prison by King Phillip IV (the Fair) on charges of heresy. Four years later, on March 14, 1314 the last Grand Master of the Templars was burned at the stake and just like that, The Poor Fellow Soldiers of Jesus Christ ceased to exist as their property and remaining membership around Europe merged with other Crusading Orders (i.e. Hospitallers). Or at least that is how most main-stream scholars portray the event. Many of the Templars are thought to have gone “underground” to form secret orders and societies – some even purported to exist to this day. Regardless of what you believe happened the important part is to understand why the Templars were targeted by King Phillip IV and Pope Clement. If you read enough scholarly sources, you might come to the conclusion that the Catholic Church (i.e. the Pope) was jealous of the power that the Order had throughout the Christian world, while King Phillip was in desperate need of money that he felt he could confiscate from the Templars by having them disbanded in his kingdom. The truth is a combination of those theories, along with the overarching theme that the Templars were no longer relevant in the 1300s.

A little more than fifteen years before their arrests, the Templars were kicked out of the Holy Land and had to retreat to Cyprus, and the idea circled throughout Western Europe that reform of the military orders was needed. Unfortunately, the Templars were either ignorant of the views espoused by the elite of Europe, or the Grand Master and other Officers of the Order wanted to regain their glory from the previous century and chose to ignore these opinions. What the ancient Templars failed to realize was that they were just one of many military Orders and no matter how great they were, it would always be a struggle to wage war in the Holy Land when politics and finances were involved. They failed to realize that during the previous century they had evolved into something completely different. By the late 1200s the Templars had transformed themselves into the equivalent of modern bankers. By the time the arrests of 1307 took place the Templars were not only providing crude banking services to people traveling throughout Western Europe and the Holy Land, they were also acting as tax collectors for many of the monarchs across the continent. Their purpose had evolved from that of a military organization to that of a financial institution. Unfortunately, they wanted to remain a military force when that type of organization was no longer needed.

While this is a simplistic view of what caused the downfall of the Templars, it none-the-less gives us a chance to look at our modern organization to see if we are effectively evolving. We may find that we are trying to retain a grasp on something that the modern

world (and modern Masons) may view as obsolete. What are the reasons we give to potential members to entice them to join? I have often heard the slogan “Every Christian Mason a Knight Templar,” and wondered if this has ever really convinced anyone to join. Is this the reason why we exist – to allow Christian Masons to meet away from Masons of other faiths? Since transferring my Scottish Rite membership to the Valley of Miami many years ago, I have participated in various Fall and Spring Reunions ranging from classes of twenty-five candidates to classes well over fifty candidates. Regrettably, I have rarely attended a York Rite Festival with so many candidates. Why is this? Does the Scottish Rite make Masons feel better because they get to refer to themselves as a 32° Mason, rather than a Knight Templar? Do Blue Lodge Masons even realize that the 4° through the 32° is a completely different system when compared to what we teach in the Blue Lodges, and that the York Rite Degrees actually complement their Blue Lodge education as practiced throughout the United State (with few exceptions)?

In the early 1990s the Scottish Rite S.J. took on the moniker “The College of Freemasonry” and soon thereafter produced the Master Craftsmen Program, which frankly is a great way for Scottish Rite Masons to understand the rituals of that Masonic Body. We too have developed programs in recent years but because our rituals have evolved over 200 years, unlike the Scottish Rite rituals which were rewritten by Pike barely 100 years ago (and largely remain unchanged), it is hard to find modern resources to learn about them from an academic perspective, although this is slowly changing. As a system (Rite) composed of three separate and distinct Masonic Bodies we cannot expect to be viewed or operate like the Scottish Rite. Yet we seem to conduct our Festivals like the Scottish Rite conducts their Reunions. Why? Is it really helpful to us in the modern era or are we simply doing it because “that’s the way it has always been done?”

While the Scottish Rite might claim to be the College of Freemasonry the York Rite might need to start viewing itself as the “Corporate University of the Blue Lodge.” I have noticed from personal experience that if a Mason becomes Master of his Lodge after having served as head of one of the York Rite Bodies, he does immensely better when compared to a Mason whose first time in the East is when he is installed as Worshipful Master. Spending time in the York Rite allows Masons to better understand how to run a meeting with much less pressure. There are still many of the same commitments that are required of a York Rite dais officer, but on a much smaller scale. The York Rite gives a Mason the chance to get his “feet wet” in the East before taking over the solemn responsibility of running a Lodge. The Grand Encampment has even developed a leadership training program held in conjunction with all Regional Conferences throughout the year with a focus on making Masonic officer better leaders within their respective organizations. This program is something all of you should consider taking and I would highly recommend that if you have someone in your Blue Lodge that is working his way up the line, to consider proposing his name for enrollment into this worthy program.

As I wrap up this monthly installment, I want you to ponder how we as an Order might need to change to remain relevant. Are we merely here to put on the degrees twice a year and place badges and pins on our uniform, or do we serve a greater purpose? What are we doing as Templars to make ourselves and Masonry relevant for today’s world?

Donec Totem Impleat Orbem,

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