

Grand Oration
R.: W.: Antonio C. Chavez
W.: Grand Orator
2020 - 2021

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Right Worshipful Deputy Grand Master, Elected and Appointed Grand Lodge Officers, Most Worshipful Past Grand Masters, Distinguish East, Guests, and My Brethren:
Good afternoon!

First, I would like to thank you, Most Worshipful Grand Master, Thomas L. Turlington, Jr., for the honor and the privilege you have bestowed upon me as the Grand Orator and to serve the Craft under your Grand Mastership and the opportunity and the experience to travel with you throughout the State; further advancing your theme of UNITY, COMMUNICATION, and ACCOUNTABILITY. I thank you.

Secondly, I'd like to thank my family who are not here today due to current health guidelines. My oldest daughter, the wonderful and amazing Gina Chavez; her sister, the thoughtful and caring daughter, Alex, and her husband, my son in law, also a Brother, a Delegate who was able to join us today, their little baby girl, my pride and joy, my 8-month old granddaughter, Yael Quinn, for their unwavering and continued support throughout my Masonic journey and for their unconditional love and care. I thank them from the bottom of my heart. I know their Mom is looking down so proud of them; I love them all so much.

It's been almost 51 years since I first left the Pacific Islands of the Philippines at a very young age to join and serve in the United States Navy; and I vividly recall what my parents told me on that memorable and poignant day I left the place of my birth; that as long I have faith and believe in myself, with conscious, deliberate, and determined effort, anything is possible. Be cognizant that the decisions I make will shape my future. Make a meaningful contribution to society in effecting positive change. Do good and be kind to others, especially to the less fortunate, without any expectation of return. To have good manners at all times and practice the "golden rule;" to not be so quick to judge others. Treat everyone equally with respect and dignity. Speak and fight for those who are unable to speak for themselves by standing up for what is lawfully, morally, and ethically right, even if I am standing alone. That my word is my honor. And those are a few of the many lessons they impressed upon me and why I am standing here before you today.

Today you will have a unique experience. Because I will deliver this oration in my first language. That is in English with my Irish-Filipino accent.

So hopefully this afternoon I can effect positive change. And if I can't make this speech memorable, I will try to make it short. However, this Oration can be read in its entirety and has been published and distributed.

Service. Humanity. Impact. Difference. Betterment. As Masons, these words comprise the total sum of our life's driven purpose and existence; because "Masonry is a way of life."

Each time we gather to celebrate this annual event, we bear witness to an association formed and perfected in so much union and harmony. And today, we, it's members, greatly rejoice and reaffirm our dedication and continued commitment to strengthen our never ending endeavor of kindness and goodwill to mankind; a sincere wish of being serviceable to our fellow creatures; to demonstrate and pass on the great truths and wisdom of the ages and transmit them unimpaired to the latest posterity.

This week is our 192nd Annual Grand Communication. Today is a very special event to celebrate. As evident by the many members who are present and traveled from afar, there is one common goal we share: to strengthen that harmony, love, and affection, uniting and bonding us as Friends and Brothers.

Today is also Memorial Day, a day for us to remember the men and women of the Armed Forces who died while serving our country. Let us pause to recall to our remembrance those whose unselfish act of extraordinary courage made the ultimate sacrifice.

To all active military, past and present, and to my fellow veterans, we are eternally grateful. I thank you for your service.

Throughout my oration, you will notice and hear the mention of some words, phrases, and passages that sound quite familiar to us, and often used and recited in our Masonic Rituals. Equally important is its application to every Brother in the fulfillment of his oath and obligation.

With passionate desire to approach his task with sincerity and purpose, he will strive to “duly and truly prepare” himself to the duties and responsibilities of his Masonic life, conducted on high principles of our time-honored institution.

What is Freemasonry? Who are we? Why are we here? What is the purpose of our existence? As recited by the Installing Officer during the annual Particular Lodge Installation of Officers:

“Freemasonry is a moral institution, established by virtuous men with a praiseworthy design of recalling to our remembrance, the most sublime truths, in the midst of innocent and social pleasures founded on liberality, brotherly love and charity. It is a beautiful system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. Truth is its center—the point where the radii diverge— and directs its deciles to a correct knowledge of the Great Architect of the Universe, and the moral laws which He has ordained for their government.”

“Recalling to our remembrance” the most sublime truths and wisdom of the ages passed on with pride and honor by our Brethren of ancient times. But how do we pass them on? How do we pass on and transmit the principal tenets of our profession, the inculcation and practice of those truly commendable virtues: Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth?

The answer is simple; it is found in the beginning of the Opening Charge:

“The ways of virtue are beautiful. Knowledge is attained by Degrees. Wisdom dwells in contemplation, therefore we should seek it. Let us then, Brethren, apply ourselves with becoming zeal, to the practice of the excellent principles inculcated by our Order. Let us remember that the great objects of our association are the restraints of improper passions, the cultivation of an active benevolence and the promotion of a correct knowledge of the duties we owe to God, our neighbor, and to ourselves. Let us be united and practice with diligence the sacred tenets of our Order”.

“Knowledge is attained by Degrees”. It is achieved when we possess a thorough and meaningful understanding of our Rituals, their profound significance, their practical application in the government of our conduct, not only in the Lodge but outside and when abroad in the world.

Our Rituals are what differentiate us from other organizations and fraternities. They are the prime movers – they cement and support our Masonic thoughts. They are the stimulus of philosophical understanding

of Masonic History. Ritual is the language of Freemasonry; the way we communicate. We must learn and understand these Rituals. Failure to do so, becomes an obstacle to living a “Masonic Life”, and of being serviceable to our fellow creatures.

That’s why it is incumbent upon us, especially to our new Masons, to truly understand the Fraternity that we have joined. The Degree Team must be thoroughly proficient in performing all parts of the ceremony. Prompting should be non-existent or minimal at best, thus being able to inform and convey to the candidate its profound significance and “symbolize that birth of intellectual light in the mind,” without him getting lost in the translation. The inability to expertly understand and perform these rites would be to him, “mysterious and incomprehensible.” The new Brother may have received the “rights and benefits,” but little, if any “light?”

In short, my Brothers, the experience of a well performed Degree is important in the life of a new Mason. It is the spark that ignites their yearning, to learn and live in service. As well as it functions as the window into the strength, health, and soundness of that Lodge.

We cannot expect a new Brother to receive Masonic Light if the meaning of the Ritual is not studied and learned. My Brethren, it is our mission to mentor these newly Initiated, Passed, and Raised Brothers. We must guide and engage them in the meanings of those invaluable Ritual phrases and passages.

Excellent performance is the medium by which these meanings are delivered to the “attentive ear and discerning eye.” Meaning cannot be gained from observing poor performance or worse yet, indifference.

I am reminded of a story. When a Mason of a Lodge went to heaven and after identifying himself as the Past Master of a Lodge, Saint Peter immediately took him to the Masonic Clock Room where, in puzzlement he observed was , filled with clocks. Each clock had a Lodge’s name on a brass plate and strangely enough each clock was at a different time. He asked why and he was informed that the clock hands only moved when someone in that Lodge made a mistake in the Ritual. Looking around and not finding his Lodge clock, he asked Saint Peter where’s his Lodge clock as he couldn’t see it. Saint Peter replied, “why... it’s in the kitchen of course!” “The Kitchen?” said the Master. “Yes! You see, we needed a new fan!”

Joking aside, the proficient performance of ritual and delivered meanings are the catalyst of Masonic Education. We confer the Degrees, deliver the Lectures and Charges, explain the use and meaning of the Working Tools. We impress upon his mind, our principal Tenets, the practice of those truly commendable Cardinal Virtues, the fulfillment of our Sacred Oaths and Obligations, and the subjects that are the heart and soul of our Fraternity. And with this knowledge, he is symbolically and metaphorically transformed from a good man, inspired, and made himself into a better man.

Thus, along this path of growth and evolution, both he and the Institution are made stronger and more solidified. It is up to us to make ourselves better men by first learning and then applying the tenets, principles, and lessons learned as illustrated in the Ritual.

In order for us to pursue such endeavors and goals, it is also imperative that we equip and familiarize ourselves with the necessary books, manuals, and aids; the Digest of the Masonic Law of Florida, the Books of Adopted Forms and Ceremonies, Master Mason Educational courses, classes, and seminars, to name a few.

Improving our knowledge by taking Masonic Courses, seeking guidance, listening, and “COMMUNICATING well-informed Brethren” who have gone that way before us, and “who will always be as ready to give, as we will be to receive instruction,” thus, it builds and strengthens our internal as well as our Fraternal journeys.

In World War II, during the Japanese-American war in the Philippines, my father worked with the United States Army as a guerrilla scout doing advanced reconnaissance. He passed on to me a very important lesson he learned from observing soldiers and paratroopers. With his signature rationale, he explained that, if and when I find myself in a discussion with others, to never forget that “a mind is like a parachute; it does not function when it is not open.” So true.

Likewise, no knowledge can be gained without study and examination of the aforementioned books and manuals. But first, they must be opened. When closed, they are, but a mute testimony to the ideas and wisdom of their pages.

Be mindful that possession of an encyclopedia of information and good ideas is no substitute...no substitute for implementation, even for the very least of those ideas, details, and particulars are put into actual practice.

Action is the essence of achievement and success. Not discussion no matter how intelligent or convincing the talk; because action generates creativity and success.

However, in so doing, we must all be accountable for our “thoughts, words, and actions.” In every endeavor we take, ACCOUNTABILITY is paramount. We cannot correct or cure any wrongdoings if we ignore them or pretend they do not exist. Consequently, it necessitates administration of corrective measure or appropriate Masonic Justice.

Over the years, I’ve gained and experienced the true meaning and profound significance of many Ritualistic questions and their subsequent answers. And many times over, in differing contexts the same questions propounded kept arising, specifically, “what do I expect to experience and gain from Masonry? Why and what is it worth to me?” In other words, “What I put in and what I get out of it?”

If Masonry causes me these resounding inquiries and repeatedly reinforces their existence in the recesses of my inner being, then I will have received in my lifetime, one of the greatest gifts the Fraternity can bestow. And as I reflect upon my answers, I am reminded of the ideals my parents taught me.

For in the process, I’ve learned to strengthen the core values they have instilled upon me and how to live in accord with them. And I realize that the many small and apparent inconsequential experiences and decisions that make up my days on this earth all add up and define who and why I am today and what I am becoming.

With their foundation, the knowledge shared with me in Brotherhood and my “travels” I came up with an acronym: Hitch - H.I.T.C.H., my constant daily reminder:

H- Honesty
I- Integrity
T- Truth
C- Character
H- Humility

And to borrow a passage from a video clip titled, "A Charge to the Fraternity" by Benjamin Franklin, he states the very simple definition of Freemasonry:

"Freemasonry is the very measure of a man...the very measure of a man. Because Freemasonry believes that a man's greatness can be measured, not by his wealth or his fame. But by his deeds, his character, his truth, his tolerance, his charity, his trust, his friendship, his love for his fellow creature. And to do good is the best way to glorify God."

Our belief in our tenets and practice of those truly commendable virtues, "frequently inculcated and forcibly recommended," in our Lodge. Brotherly Love and Relief is a duty incumbent upon all men, especially among us Masons. Not because we expect others to pay it forward or repay the deeds, but we must act without expectations; not only because we are Masons, but because it is the right thing to do, Mason or not.

We are taught to lead by example and the best example we can set, is one where we serve our community WITHOUT asking for recognition, expecting praise, or urging reciprocation. It is THAT dedication and anonymous service that WILL SERVE as the greatest form of inspiring others on their own volition to join the Order.

Expecting reciprocity diminishes the very value behind the deeds. Not a Masonic symbol on our shirts, hats, or rings nor a title on Masonic business cards, a Masonic decal or plates on our cars, COULD EVEN COME CLOSE to encapsulating the very Honor of being a Freemason.

We have an unconditional obligation to be serviceable to our fellow creatures. We must choose and act to be good stewards of humanity within our communities and the world and hope that our service ALONE, draws attention without imposition upon the objects of our good deeds. We must keep the values and principles of Freemasonry at the forefront of everything we do, including our efforts to inspire and attract new brothers.

So we become "worthy and well qualified," and so are the fruits of our labors as we "HITCH" to "follow our conductors" without fearing peril.

This is the real meaning of being a Mason. Align ourselves along the appropriate paths with Honesty, Integrity, Truth, Character, and Humility. Then and only then can we begin to appreciate the value of Ritual and symbol of our Work.

I commend all the members and those who are clothed with the authority to direct the affairs of this organization for your commitment and dedication to reach out to the 21st century and this ever-changing world.

Today, more than ever, we need leaders. Some of us must direct and marshal, so others must, of course, learn to submit and abide. Humility in both is an essential duty. Let us all work together in close harmony toward attaining fraternal excellence. This is essential to continually champion the UNITY of its members to have a voice in humanity through our "never ending quest for nobler deeds, for higher thoughts, for greater achievements."

So, let us all join together by making a difference in effecting positive impact to many and bringing joy and happiness in their lives. I, therefore, trust that we will have but one aim, to please each other, and unite in the grand design of being happy and communicating happiness.

“Together, our hearts and tongues will join in promoting each other’s welfare and rejoicing in each other’s prosperity”.

May kindness and affection distinguish our conduct as men, Masons, and friends. Within your peaceful walls, may your children’s children celebrate with joy and gratitude the annual recurrence of this inspiring occasion.

And remember that line in the Closing Charge:

“let it not be supposed that you have here labored in vain and spent your strength for naught, for your work is with the Lord and your recompense with your God.”

So, I invite you my Brothers to soar high with me, to recall with gratitude the diligence, commitment, and devotion of those Brethren who came this way before us. Let us join together to choose hope over fear; unity of purpose over conflict and discord; and further cultivate, spread, and promote with pride and honor the knowledge of Masonry as a worthwhile way of life. Thus, making it known widely as an organization of excellence; an institution of service, effecting positive change, making an impact, BE the difference in the world.

Let us come together and grab this opportunity “carpe diem,” right now, “seize the day” to rededicate and recommit ourselves and this Institution to make progress and shape our future.

Let us, each of us, now embrace our sacred obligation and our solemn duty with awesome joy and gratitude the annual recurrence of this inspiring occasion with common effort and purpose, with passion and dedication, to answer the clarion call of history and carry into an uncertain future the precious light of humanity and transmit the tenets of our profession; pure and unimpaired for a better world for generations to come.

May Almighty God delight to dwell with, and bless us all, always.

Thank you.