

Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Florida
193rd Grand Communication
R.: W.: Ernest William Catsulis Jr.
W.: Grand Orator 2021-2022
Grand Oration

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Elected and Appointed Grand Lodge Officers, Distinguished East, family and friends, guests assembled, and my esteemed Brethren All:

It is no secret within my circle of family, my friends, acquaintances, and more than likely any person I meet in my travels, that I am a proud Freemason.

I became a Mason on February 16, 2009, in Ornan Lodge No. 117 Free and Accepted Masons in the small town of Williston, Florida. It's a small country Lodge that was Chartered on January 21, 1890.

My personal Masonic journey began in Hammond, Louisiana, while reading a Masonic Bible on a friend's coffee table which piqued my curiosity. Around that same time, another "friend" of mine, who would often stay at my home, had just become a Master Mason himself in Canada. Both suggested that I should look into the Fraternity, as they thought I was well suited for the Work and that I would enjoy it. Both men, who became my Brothers were there at Ornan Lodge when I was Raised to the sublime Degree of Master Mason on August 22, 2009, by my Canadian Brother who traveled 1,200 miles each way across an international border for all three of my Degrees. While we don't get together as much as we used to, a simple phone call or the rare visit with either one elicits great Masonic Fellowship between us, as it should. To this day I remember how they both told me that this Fraternity would change my life. That I would... "eat it up!" And while it took longer than it should have to get through the process of finding a Lodge and completing the petitioning process that started me on my path, (we all know anything worth having is not always easy) they were both right. It did indeed change my life. At that time, I was both overwhelmed and amazed that they took the time and made the physical effort to be there as I began my Masonic journey. As I progressed in my Masonic Education, I began to understand what being there for me meant to them, why they were there, and why someday soon I would also travel three times to Alabama for a good friend's Three Degrees and later the same way for others. Because of the wonderful example these Brothers set for me we will be forever linked together by that Brotherly bond.

In my daily walk through life, the question I most often get is, "what is Freemasonry?" My typical answer is probably similar to yours. "Freemasonry is a system of Morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols," with a brief (well not really brief who am I kidding) explanation of what we do. How we as Masons help our community, how **we take good men and make them better**, help the needy, support our widows and orphans, support local schools and our valued first responders, whether they be Masons or not. Typically, these objectives are met through work in our Blue Lodge and the Appendant Bodies we may be involved with. Through countless ways, we endeavor to improve our human family and their respective walks through life. These honorable deeds which became part of our Fraternity's story long after Freemasonry was modernized over the past three hundred years, it seems, are the most prevalent subjects in the explanation of what

we Freemasons are. Each of us have been charged to continually exemplify the goodness of our Craft, as well as to help form how this ancient and honorable Fraternity is perceived by the general public. Even though we all should know as Masons, our Lodges are Chartered to do one thing...make new Masons. All of these other noble deeds, however fulfilling, are ancillary to that one duty to create new Masons.

Yet, as Freemasons, most of us should know that it is more than just that, much more. I have found that we sometimes forget and lay aside many other important benefits of this magnificent undertaking. It is also a vehicle by which we can better enjoy our own lives, our individual walk through this life through our Masonic relationships.

The actual BROTHERHOOD of men and all the benefits of the intimate relationships we create, help to make our society, our band of Brothers, such a great organization to belong to. Our Work says that **“Masonry unites men of every Country, Sect and Opinion and conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.”** You see, my dear Brothers, we are all here at this place, at this time, because of one singular circumstance. Because we chose to believe in the obligations we have taken upon ourselves. These obligations are something that we all take most seriously. With each one, we opened our hearts and minds to new ideas, to our newly formed Masonic relationships, regardless of age, race, nationality, wealth, or political ideology. None of us knew, at that particular moment of our Initiation, what being a Mason was really all about. It was therefore in my not so humble opinion, a **“leap of faith”**, that the journey we were embarking on, was going to make us all better men. The reality is most of us had barely any way of knowing anything about what we were signing up for. Each of our experiences were different due to our own perception. While not exactly the same, all were close enough, that we were all staring at the same exact point and certainly in the same condition. I promise you here today that I certainly did not know the places my **leap of faith** into Freemasonry would take me. The relationships I have formed in Lodge meetings, in nine different states and two countries in the last 13 years became a path I could never have imagined.

I have had the opportunity to travel with several Grand Masters and other Distinguished Brethren in my personal Masonic career. With Entered Apprentices, Fellow Crafts, and Master Masons alike. It is a journey that I encourage each of you to endeavor towards, if you have not had the honor to do so already. I have observed and participated in great events in foreign countries, as well as attending meetings in small rural areas, in tiny old Lodge Rooms and the grandest Masonic Edifices. This path has allowed me to serve the Craft in many different roles, to preside over meetings in my mother Lodge with just three or four Brothers; barely enough to be able to open Lodge. Conversely, to open a Lodge in a National Monument with over 50 distinguished Brethren from several different Grand Jurisdictions, as well as to stand here before you today in this auspicious role that will forever be engraved in my memory. Heady stuff when you hear it. I sincerely do not consider myself special for these particular honors. I do, however, consider myself extremely blessed to have formed relationships with those men, my dear Brothers, on those trips and in those Lodges comprised of 3, 53, or 1,053. Teaching Catechisms and watching my Brothers enjoy the Masonic Work they get to do; watching them make Masons as I was honored to make them, simply because they made a choice to take that **leap of faith**, learn their Work and put it to good use, which changed their lives, as well as mine and yours. All it took was a little courage to seek out the opportunity to improve ourselves.

Anais Nin said "Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage" So maybe the topic of this oration could be **courage**. *Maya Angelou once said... and I quote "One isn't necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest."* end quote. So, maybe the title should be **Potential**. Both are apropos of course, but for my journey, it seems potential led me to courage and that allowed me to take it, that **leap of faith**.

Regardless of how we got here, what we claim it was that brought us together as Brothers, to this time, to this place, we too must recognize that we are all here because WE, each and every one of us had the same potential, the same courage to take that **leap of faith**. Swearing to obey our obligations to each other. To be good men and Masons, swearing not to the Fraternity and not even to our God, but to each individual worthy Brother whomever and wherever they may be.

My Brothers, each one of us has the power to make those walks better for our fellow man, starting with ourselves. I encourage you to look around and remember those who also took that leap of faith. To cultivate new Masonic relationships across all previously mentioned lines and borders. To FOSTER (pun Most intended) those relationships that already exist, and most importantly set the example by reaching out to reinvigorate that Brotherly relationship which may seem lost, in keeping with the spirit of unity within the Craft.

Travel when you can, and where you can. Even if it's just a few feet away to shake hands with the Brother behind you that you have never met; across the table at dinner tonight, in your District, State, or across international borders. Have the courage with the singular goal that the relationships you form from your interaction with your Brothers will improve not only your walk through life, but theirs as well.

I will leave you with a quote that has served me well in this Fraternity, Edward Everett Hale, an American Author wrote "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do." By following the fine example of Edward Everett Hale, our Fraternity will benefit and we will all be the better because of it. We are all linked together by that indissoluble chain of sincere affection because we have all taken the same giant **leap of faith**.

May the Supreme Architect of the Universe grant his blessing upon each and every one of you here today.

Thank You