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Supreme Grand Master's Year End Message 2020

Sir Knights, Greetings!

This year certainly has been different in every way possible.

Normally, as a year's end nears, each and every one of us would be cheerily reflecting on the year that just was with fond memories and maybe just a few regrets. Definitely, that's not the case in 2020.

To quote our Prime Minister, the year 2020 has indeed been unprecedented in the most peculiar way: what with the pandemic and everything associated with this insidious worldwide virus. Indeed, life as we know it has been so upheaved and become so disjointed that it is difficult to understand what direction we should all be heading.

Unfortunately, in my personal instance, my family was delivered a double-whammy when my wife, Marie, was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease on November 3rd. Since then, life has been a lifetime of tears and emotions, questions and no answers.

After what appears to be a lifetime of hard world and toil, we were looking forward to sharing our retirements by travelling and finally doing the things that we like to do together and to enjoy grandchildren and the such. Hopefully, God willing, life will allow us to return to most of those planned future events?

Yet I know with certainly that my family's personal challenges pale with those of many

others. How can I compare our personal situation with the multiple tragedies, which have occurred in Nova Scotia, and elsewhere, over the past year? How can I compare our personal situation with the calamities and tragic events, which occurred around the world? How can I compare my sorrow with that experienced by the many forgotten indigenous communities across Canada and around the world? How can I compare my sadness with that of the relatives and friends of the over 35,000 Canadians who have died as a direct result of contracting COVID-19 over the past year?

Even Christmas appears to have been displaced worldwide as a time of joy and hope, a time of celebration and merriment. Whereas, it normally is a time for families and friends to come together and celebrate, we now find ourselves isolated and confused, exhausted and longing.

Freemasonry, in particular, has also been thrown into certain disarray and darkness, with all Masons longing for the time that we can return to a semi-normal routine of personalized social visits and ritual. Even the strongest of us all have found ourselves at times doubting as to whether we will ever be able to return to even a semi-normal life.

But this is what we understand indeterminate hope and faith to be all about. Even at the darkest of times, an inner strength, which mysteriously appears from nowhere, emerge victori-

ous. As the saying goes, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Many of us, as Knights Templar, would attribute this nature of spirit to the enlightenment that we have gained as Freemasons, forever climbing a metaphorical ladder to the heavens above.

Others will attribute it to mankind's ability to love one another and to share a passion for a belief in the Holy Trinity, a belief in the Supreme Being, a belief in the Creator, a belief in God. Others will attribute it to the undying spirit, the undying fire, which rests within all of us to not only survive but to thrive. Others will attribute it to our need to share and to socialize, to be human in all of our failures and achievements.

Regardless of what, or who, we attribute our inner desires of hope to, I know that the bond of brotherhood between all of us will come out of this pandemic stronger and brighter, for the acts of kindness and empathy, of charity and goodwill, which I have witnessed over the past year will remain with me forever.

Whether it's been a kind yet simple gesture, a moment of silence, between individuals during a Zoom meeting or a phone call out of the blue, these acts will not go unrewarded. Whether it's a small personal gift left at the front door or a charitable donation made in the name of a family member or friend, these are all indications of the light that burns brightly in all of us. Whether it's the delivery of some groceries to a Brother or Widow in distress, these acts of kindness will not go unnoticed.

Take heart, Sir Knights, there is a forever brightness, which will soon return to our lives. I am confident of this. I am confident that our everlasting hope and love will triumph.

I am confident that science will endure and produce a vaccine, which will be highly effective regardless of what strain or mutation of the virus that we will be dealing with in the next six months. I am also confident that the majority of the Canadian population will opt to receive the vaccine, in order to ensure its nation-wide effectiveness.

Will this be enough to allow us to meet in person in Toronto at our planned Annual Assembly next August? I am not as confident but pray that we will be able to come together at the appropriate time. Only time and God's good graces will tell.

May we then reflect on the end of 2020 with enlightenment and hope.

On New Year's Eve specifically, I definitely will hope and pray for kindness and empathy towards my fellow Brethren and mankind and pray for a brighter 2021 for all! May hope spring eternal!

Yours in the Bonds of our Order,



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Supreme Grand Master,
Sovereign Great Priory Knights Templar of Canada

Deputy Grand Master's Message

We are drawing close to the Holiday Festive season and the cloud of COVID-19 still hangs above us. Those in power have declared that "Christmas is Cancelled." The problem is that they have been jaded by their terms in office and the power it wields. While they have made their proclamations it also shows how much faith in the Christmas Holidays they have lost. They measure the value of Christmas only in material terms. Yes, we will not have the Christmas Eve church service or the large family gatherings. But what we will still have is the spirit of the first Christmas. That night when our Saviour was born in a manger amongst the animals with few visitors. The Holy Spirit was appeared and blessed all those present.

As we spend this Christmas thinking of friends and family in the quiet glow of the Christmas tree, let us remember the Holidays past and revisit old friends and family we have lost contact with. Share the true Christmas spirit and bring joy into their lives by making that contact. Lighten their spirits and they will lift yours as well. The Christmas spirit is not to be locked away when times are difficult as if hoarding it for another day. It is to be shared and brought forward to remind us that in these most difficult days it is there for us. It is our duty to maintain that spirit of our saviour's birth to remind us of all the difficulties he suffered through and still kept his faith. So let us make this truly a Spiritual Christmas and give people the gift of joy and light up their lives knowing we are celebrating Christ's birthday.

May the Holy Spirit fill your hearts with joy and the true meaning of Christmas. Many holiday wishes, from me and my lady MaryAnn.

I look forward to the next time we meet.

Geoffrey C. Perry, 207

Grand Chaplain's Christmas Message

As I write this message, we are in the middle of the season of Advent in the church calendar. The word "Advent" means "coming". We are waiting for something to come. First, we are waiting to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child as it happened some 2000 years ago. Second, we are waiting for the Christ to return "in clouds of glory." Third, we are waiting for God's action in our own daily lives.

The season of Advent in the church year is a time of waiting, a time of preparation. It's like a mini-Lent when we prepare for the resurrection of the Christ on Easter Sunday. While we wait, we prepare ourselves for the coming Christmas celebration. All around us we see signs of the coming festival in stores and public places. We ourselves are decorating our homes, making plans, cooking and baking goodies, getting gifts for our friends and loved ones, and giving to various charities.

In a normal year our churches would be doing similar traditional things through the period of Advent in preparation to celebrate the birth of the infant Jesus. This year, however, is anything but normal. We cannot gather in person in the church so there is no community Advent wreath with the traditional lighting of the candles. We must be satisfied with the candles we light in our own homes.

Waiting this year appears much more difficult than in other times because of the pandemic. It seems as if there is no end to the waiting for life to return to "normal". Lodge meetings are suspended, not only for the Craft lodges but also for all the concordant bodies, including the preceptories of our beloved Order. We miss the rituals and the fellowship of our brethren. We are cut off from visiting loved ones in person. Our medical professionals and politicians advise us not to travel at a time when many of us would be visiting with family and friends. Businesses are shut down or restricted and many are unemployed or have lost hours. While not quite so bad here, our neighbours to the south have lost more than a quarter million lives to the disease.

So, we wait – as Mary waited to give birth to Jesus. While Mary is in her last month of waiting, we have already reached our full nine months of the pandemic with no end in sight. We may be tempted to see these as signs of the "End Times". However, one hundred and two years ago, in 1918, the mayor of Kelowna closed "all Schools, public and private, Churches, Theatres, Moving Picture Halls, Pool Rooms and other places of amusement, and Lodge meetings" because of the Spanish Flu pandemic. There is hope in the knowledge that in due time we will move past this pandemic as well.

We have waited more than two millennia for the Second Coming of Christ "in clouds of glory." There is a saying in our culture about something being "slower than the Second Coming." It becomes easy to assume that it will never happen in our lifetime. But that's because we keep thinking of the apocalyptic end times in scripture as a one-time future event when God through some great cosmic action will reconcile all things in God's self. While this may happen, it is beyond us to know when and how. We must live in the here and now. We are called to wait and to keep awake.

So, we wait. How do we wait? As with the pandemic we can wait passively until it passes, or we can wait actively. We can sleep or keep awake. We can sit at home watching TV or the internet and doing nothing or we can use the time productively to accomplish those tasks which we have put off. We can learn something new. We can reach out to others by phone or by computer. There are many ways we can be active without physical contact with others. We have the time to reflect on how we have been, and are being, formed by God. As Isaiah says, "we are the clay, and you are our potter." Spend some time in prayer and meditation to reflect on how you are being molded.

So, we keep awake. As finite humans we cannot comprehend the infinity of God beyond both time and space. We cannot know when or how God will act finally to bring shalom among us; we can only wait and keep awake to God's presence in our lives and in that of others. Being

awake to oneself allows one to be awake to others. Most important, though, is being awake to God. Christ does not only come once in human form and once “in clouds of glory” but constantly in our lives. We just need to be awake to that presence.

One thing I have learned over the years, especially since I retired, is patience. With patience and acceptance of those things we cannot change, comes peace. Peace with others and peace with self. Have you ever in your own life experienced peace which followed from forgiving someone or yourself or when you have forgiven another? In either case forgiveness and restoration bring peace – peace in the sense of “shalom” when all things are in just and right relationship with God and each other. When this pandemic passes, as it will, and our lodges can once again meet in person, remember this period of waiting as a time when God supported us in difficult times.

Mark’s Gospel is thought to have been written in the late sixties CE. At that time, the emperor Nero was persecuting Christians and the Jewish people were rebelling against Rome in Israel, leading to the Roman destruction of the temple in 70 CE. The main message of apocalyptic writing like the words in Mark’s Gospel is hope in difficult times. In such a time John the Baptist arrived to proclaim the coming of the one who will bring back God’s spirit to the people of Israel. It was a time of waiting in expectation for God to forgive and restore all things to righteousness. The hope which God sends to us is His own Son in human form, beginning with the helplessness of a baby. Through that child God announces that Emmanuel has come, God is with us.

As you wait this Advent and Christmas season, remember God has sent His light into the world to restore all things in His love. No matter how trying life may be in any given moment, God’s love is always with us to carry us through.

I pray a blessed Christmas filled with joy and peace for you and your loved ones.

Alan E. Akhurst Grand Chaplain

WEBSITES

Sovereign Great Priory now operates two websites. You are no doubt familiar with our original www.knightstemplar.ca We now have a “Digital Library and Archives” containing a wealth of information for the interested <https://knightstemplarlibrary.com>

We invite you to check them out.

You are a volunteer in your Lodge, Chapter, Council and Preceptory until you are elected by the members to be an officer. Now you have become the servant of the members and must strive diligently to bring honour to your office and to yourself.

*This space and more
welcomes any submission of articles, art or
other pictures of social meetings or hobbies, or
such, which are appropriate to share with your
Brother Knights for inclusion into the next
Dispatches.*