

at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.”¹²

Brethren, we appreciate your devotion and righteousness. You carry out your callings in the quorums, branches, wards, and stakes so well that the Church grows, and the whole work of God goes forward throughout the world. Through your priesthood you are able to bless in the name of the Lord your families and others you may be called upon or assigned to bless. This comes from the divine agency entrusted to us by the Lord, for He has promised, “Whomsoever you bless I will bless.”¹³

Brethren, I hope we will be faithful and true to all of our covenants. I pray that we can be totally committed in all of our family relationships, especially to our spouses, but also to our parents, our children, and grandchildren. May we be found bearing our personal testimonies of the

truthfulness of this work all the days of our lives. May we go forward in righteousness as the humble servants of the Lord, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Luke 12:23.
2. Job 32:8.
3. 1 Timothy 4:6.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 20:37.
5. Matthew 12:36.
6. See Carl Houghton, “What Am I Doing Wrong?” *New Era*, Sept. 1987, 12.
7. See Robert B. Harbertson, “The Aaronic Priesthood: What’s So Great about It,” *New Era*, May 1990, 49.
8. In Max Nolan, “J. Golden Kimball in the South,” *New Era*, July 1985, 10.
9. Matthew 5:13.
10. See Enos 1:4.
11. John 4:14.
12. Alma 34:34.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 132:47.

President Thomas S. Monson

A few weeks ago at a fast and testimony meeting at our ward, I watched a little boy on the back row mustering up courage to bear his testimony. He made three or four false starts and then sat down. Finally it was his turn. He squared his little shoulders, walked bravely up the aisle to the stand, took the two steps up to the level of the pulpit, stepped over and put his hands on the pulpit, gazed into the congregation, smiled—and then turned around, went back off those two steps and down the same aisle to his mother and father. I looked at you tonight in this vast Conference Center and thought of those listening in and could appreciate more fully the actions of that little boy.

Honoring our priesthood duties

My brethren, I am honored by the privilege to speak to you this evening. I

have contemplated what I might say to you. There has come to my mind a favorite scripture from Ecclesiastes: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). I love, I cherish the noble word *duty*.

The legendary General Robert E. Lee of American Civil War fame declared: “Duty is the sublimest word in our language. . . . You cannot do more. You should never wish to do less” (in John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations* [1968], 620).

Each of us has duties associated with the sacred priesthood which we bear. Whether we bear the Aaronic or the Melchizedek Priesthood, much is expected of each of us. The Lord Himself summed up our responsibility when He, in the revelation on the priesthood, urged, “Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and

to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence” (D&C 107:99).

I hope with all my heart and soul that every young man who receives the priesthood will honor that priesthood and be true to the trust which is conveyed when it is conferred.

The king’s emerald: a lesson on duty

Fifty-one years ago I heard William J. Critchlow Jr., then president of the South Ogden Stake who would later become an Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve, speak to the brethren of the general priesthood session of conference and retell a story concerning trust, honor, and duty. May I share the story with you. Its simple lesson applies to us today, as it did then.

“[Young] Rupert stood by the side of the road watching an unusual number of people hurry past. At length he recognized a friend. ‘Where are all of you going in such a hurry?’ he asked.

“The friend paused. ‘Haven’t you heard?’ he said.

“ ‘I’ve heard nothing,’ Rupert answered.

“ ‘Well,’ continued [the] friend, ‘the King has lost his royal emerald! Yesterday he attended a wedding of the nobility and wore the emerald on the slender golden chain around his neck. In some way the emerald became loosened from the chain. Everyone is searching, for the King has offered a reward . . . to the one who finds it. Come, we must hurry.’

“ ‘But I cannot go without asking Grandmother,’ faltered Rupert.

“ ‘Then I cannot wait. I want to find the emerald,’ replied his friend.

“Rupert hurried back to the cabin at the edge of the woods to seek his grandmother’s permission. ‘If I could find it we could leave this hut with its dampness and buy a piece of land up on the hillside,’ he pleaded with Grandmother.

“But his grandmother shook her head. ‘What would the sheep do?’ she

asked. ‘Already they are restless in the pen, waiting to be taken to the pasture, and please do not forget to take them to water when the sun shines high in the heavens.’

“Sorrowfully, Rupert took the sheep to the pasture, and at noon he led them to the brook in the woods. There he sat on a large stone by the stream. ‘If I could only have had a chance to look for the King’s emerald!’ he thought. Turning his head to gaze down at the sandy bottom of the brook, suddenly he stared into the water. What was it? It could not be! He leaped into the water, and his gripping fingers held something that was green with a slender bit of gold chain [that had been broken]. ‘The King’s emerald!’ he shouted. ‘It must have been flung from the chain when the King [astride his horse galloped across the bridge spanning the stream, and the current carried] it here.’

“With shining eyes Rupert ran to his grandmother’s hut to tell her of his great find. ‘Bless you, my boy,’ she said, ‘but you never would have found it if you had not been doing your duty, herding the sheep.’ And Rupert knew that this was the truth” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1955, 86; paragraphing, capitalization, and punctuation altered).

The lesson to be learned from this story is found in the familiar couplet: “Do [your] duty; that is best; Leave unto [the] Lord the rest!” (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Legend Beautiful,” in *The Complete Poetical Works of Longfellow* [1893], 258).

A leader’s duty does not end

To you who are or have been presidents of your quorums, may I suggest that your duty does not end when your term of office concludes. That relationship with your quorum members, your duty to them, continues throughout your life.

During the time I was a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood, I was called to be

president of the quorum. With the urging and assistance of a dedicated and inspired quorum adviser, I worked diligently to ensure that each of the young men attended our meetings regularly. Two of them were a particular challenge, but with our perseverance and love and a little persuasion, they began to attend meetings and participate in quorum activities. However, as time passed and they left the ward to pursue education and employment, each of them drifted back into inactivity.

Over the years I have seen each of these two dear friends at various functions. Whenever I do, I place a hand on their shoulder and remind them, "I'm still your quorum president, and I won't let go. You mean so much to me, and I want you to enjoy the blessings which come with activity in the Church." They know I love them and that I'll never ever give up on them.

Helping a couple return to the Church

For those of us who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, our privilege to magnify our callings is ever present. We are shepherds watching over Israel. The hungry sheep look up, ready to be fed the bread of life.

Many years ago, on a Halloween night, it was my privilege to be of assistance to one who had temporarily lost his way and needed a helping hand to return. I was driving home from the office rather late. I had been stalling on Halloween, letting my wife handle the trick-or-treat visitors. As I passed St. Mark's Hospital in Salt Lake City, I remembered that a dear friend, Max, lay ill in that very hospital. As he and I had become acquainted years before, we discovered that we had grown up in the same ward, although at different times. By the time I was born, Max and his parents had moved from the ward.

That Halloween night, I drove into the parking lot and entered the hospital. As I stopped at the desk to inquire as to

his room number, I was informed that when Max had registered at the hospital, he had listed as his religious preference not LDS but rather another church.

I entered Max's room and greeted him. I told him how proud I was to be his friend and how much I cared about him. I talked about his career in banking and as an orchestra leader on the side. I discovered that he had been offended by a comment or two from others and so had decided to attend another church. I said to him, "Max, you hold the Melchizedek Priesthood. I would like to give you a blessing tonight." He agreed, and the blessing was provided. He then informed me that his wife, Bernice, was also very ill and was, in fact, in an adjoining room. At my invitation, Max joined me in giving a blessing to her. He asked me to help him. I coached him. He anointed his wife. There were tears and embraces all around as I sealed the anointing with Max, his hands on his wife's head with mine, making that Halloween evening one ever to be remembered.

As I left the hospital that night, I stopped at the desk and told the receptionist that with the permission of Max and his wife the record should be changed to reflect their membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I waited and I watched until it was changed.

My friends Max and Bernice are now both on the other side of the veil, but they spent the last period of their lives active and happy and receiving the blessings which come with testimonies of the gospel and attendance at church.

Brethren, our task is to reach out to those who, for whatever reason, are in need of our help. Our challenge is not insurmountable. We are on the Lord's errand, and therefore we are entitled to the Lord's help. But we must try. From the play *Shenandoah* comes the spoken line which inspires: "If we don't try, then we don't do; and if we don't do, then why are we here?"

Our responsibility to be worthy

Ours is the responsibility to so conduct our lives that when the call comes to provide a priesthood blessing or to assist in any way, we are worthy to do so. We have been told that truly we cannot escape the effect of our personal influence. We must be certain that our influence is positive and uplifting.

Are our hands clean? Are our hearts pure? Looking backward in time through the pages of history, we find a lesson on worthiness gleaned from the words of the dying King Darius. Through the proper rites, Darius had been recognized as legitimate king of Egypt. His rival, Alexander the Great, had been declared legitimate son of Amon. He too was Pharaoh. Alexander, finding the defeated Darius on the point of death, laid his hands upon his head to heal him, commanding him to arise and resume his kingly power, concluding, "I swear unto thee, Darius, by all the gods, that I do these things truly and without fakery."

Darius replied with a gentle rebuke: "Alexander, my boy, . . . do you think you can touch heaven with those hands of yours?" (Adapted from Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt* [1981], 192.)

Magnifying our priesthood callings

The call of duty can come quietly as we who hold the priesthood respond to the assignments we receive. President George Albert Smith, that modest yet effective leader and eighth President of the Church, declared, "It is your duty first of all to learn what the Lord wants and then by the power and strength of His holy Priesthood to magnify your calling in the presence of your fellows in such a way that the people will be glad to follow you" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1942, 14).

And how does one magnify a calling? Simply by performing the service that pertains to it.

Brethren, it is in *doing*—not just *dreaming*—that lives are blessed, others are guided, and souls are saved. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves," declared James (James 1:22).

May all of us assembled tonight in this priesthood meeting make a renewed effort to qualify for the Lord's guidance in our lives. There are so many out there who plead and pray for help. There are those who are discouraged, those who long to return but who don't know how to begin.

I've always believed in the truth of the words "God's sweetest blessings always go by hands that serve him here below" (Whitney Montgomery, "Revelation," in *Best-Loved Poems of the LDS People*, ed. Jack M. Lyon and others [1996], 283). Let us have ready hands, clean hands, and willing hearts, that we may participate in providing what our Heavenly Father would have others receive from Him.

Blessing given to a terminally ill friend

I conclude with an example from my own life. I once had a treasured friend who seemed to experience more of life's troubles and frustrations than he could bear. Finally he lay in the hospital terminally ill. I knew not that he was there.

Sister Monson and I had gone to that same hospital to visit another person who was very ill. As we exited the hospital and proceeded to where our car was parked, I felt the distinct impression to return and make inquiry concerning whether my friend Hyrum might still be a patient there. A check with the clerk at the desk confirmed that Hyrum was indeed a patient there after many weeks.

We proceeded to his room, knocked on the door, and opened it. We were not prepared for the sight that awaited us. Balloon bouquets were everywhere. Prominently displayed on the wall was a poster

with the words “Happy Birthday, Daddy” written on it. Hyrum was sitting up in his hospital bed, his family members by his side. When he saw us, he said, “Brother Monson, how in the world did you know that today is my birthday?” I smiled, but I left the question unanswered.

Those in the room who held the Melchizedek Priesthood surrounded this, their father and grandfather and my friend, and a priesthood blessing was given.

After tears were shed, smiles of gratitude exchanged, and tender hugs received and given, I leaned over to Hyrum and spoke softly to him: “Remember the words of the Lord, for they will sustain you. He promised you, ‘I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you’ (John 14:18).”

Time marches on. Duty keeps cadence with that march. Duty does not dim nor diminish. Catastrophic conflicts come and go, but the war waged for the souls of men continues without abatement. Like a clarion call comes the word of the Lord to you and to me, and to priesthood holders everywhere. I reiterate that word: “Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the of-

fice in which he is appointed, in all diligence” (D&C 107:99).

Brethren, let us learn our duties. Let us ever be worthy to perform those duties and, in so doing, follow in the footsteps of the Master. When to Him came the call of duty, He answered, “Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever” (Moses 4:2). May we do likewise, I pray humbly, in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord, amen.

Brethren, we remind you that the Tabernacle Choir broadcast will be from 9:30 to 10:00 a.m. tomorrow morning. The Sunday morning session will immediately follow.

We express appreciation to the Melchizedek Priesthood choir from Brigham City for the beautiful music they have provided this evening.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following President Hinckley’s remarks, the choir will sing “Lead, Kindly Light.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder W. Craig Zwick of the Seventy.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Brethren, you look like a shirtsleeve priesthood. You look all dressed in white, ready to go to work. And the time has come to go to work.

What a remarkable sight this is. This great Conference Center is filled to capacity, and our words are flung across the world. This is probably the largest gathering of priesthood men that has ever occurred. I congratulate you on your presence tonight.

“Rise up, O men of God!”

I recently listened on television to a concert by the BYU Men’s Chorus. They

sang a stirring number entitled “Rise Up, O Men of God.” It was written in 1911 by William P. Merrill, and I discovered a version of it is found in our hymnbook, although I never remember singing it.

The words carry the spirit of the old English hymns written by Charles Wesley and others. The text reads:

Rise up, O men of God!
 Have done with lesser things.
 Give heart and soul and mind and
 strength
 To serve the King of Kings.
 Rise up, O men of God,
 In one united throng.