

# The True and Living Church

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First Counselor in the First Presidency

*The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true, and it lives on.*



**A**s we sustain Thomas Spencer Monson as prophet, seer, and revelator and President of the Church, and D. Todd Christofferson as an Apostle and member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, we have seen and felt evidence that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is both true and living. The Lord spoke to those through whom He restored the Church in the latter days. He said of them that they “might have power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking

unto the church collectively and not individually—

“For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance;

“Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven;

“And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received; for my Spirit shall not always strive with man, saith the Lord of Hosts.”<sup>1</sup>

This is the true Church, the only true Church, because in it are the keys of the priesthood. Only in this Church has the Lord lodged the power to seal on earth and to seal in heaven as He did in the time of the Apostle Peter. Those keys were restored to Joseph Smith, who then was authorized to confer them upon the members of the Quorum of the Twelve.

When the Prophet Joseph was murdered, the enemies of the Church thought that the Church would die. They thought it was the creation of a mortal man and therefore would perish with him. But their hopes were dashed. It was the true Church, and it also had the power to live on, even when those chosen for a time to lead it died.

We have seen today a demonstration that this is the true and living Church. The keys of the priesthood

are held by mortals, but the way has been prepared by the Lord for the keys to remain functioning on the earth so long as the people exercise faith both that the keys are on the earth and that they have been passed on by the will of God to His chosen servants.

God's people have not always been worthy of the marvelous experience we have shared today. The Apostles, after the Ascension of Christ, continued to exercise the keys He left with them. But because of disobedience and loss of faith by the members, the Apostles died without the keys being passed on to successors. We call that tragic episode "the Apostasy." Had the members of the Church in those days had the opportunity and the will to exercise faith as you have today, the Lord would not have taken the keys of the priesthood from the earth. So this is a day of historical significance and of eternal importance in the history of the world and to the children of our Heavenly Father.

Now our obligation is to remain worthy of the faith necessary for us to fulfill our promise to sustain those who have been called. The Lord was well pleased with the Church at the beginning of the Restoration, as He is today. But He cautioned the members then, as He does now, that He cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. For us to sustain those who have been called today, we must examine our lives, repent as necessary, pledge to keep the Lord's commandments, and follow His servants. The Lord warns us that if we do not do those things, the Holy Ghost will be withdrawn, we will lose the light which we have received, and we will not be able to keep the pledge we have made today to sustain the Lord's servants in His true Church.

Each of us must make an individual evaluation. First, we need to measure the depth of our gratitude for membership in the true Church of Jesus



**President Thomas S. Monson and President Dieter F. Uchtdorf welcome Elder D. Todd Christofferson, newly sustained to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.**

Christ. Second, we need to know by the power of the Holy Ghost in what ways we can do better in keeping the commandments.

We know from prophecy that not only will the true and living Church not be taken from the earth again, but it will become better. Our lives will be transformed for the better as we exercise faith unto repentance, always remember the Savior, and try ever harder to keep His commandments. The scriptures contain promises that when the Lord comes again to His Church, He will find it spiritually prepared for Him. That should make us both determined and optimistic. We must do better. We can. And we will.

On this day especially it would be wise to determine to sustain with our faith and our prayers all those who serve us in the kingdom. I am personally aware of the power of the faith of members of the Church to sustain those who have been called. In the last few weeks I have felt in powerful

ways the prayers and the faith of people whom I do not know and who know me only as someone called to serve through the keys of the priesthood. President Thomas S. Monson will be blessed by your sustaining faith. His family will likewise have blessings poured out upon them because of your faith and your prayers. All those who were sustained by you today will be sustained by God because of their faith and yours.

Every member will have opportunities to sustain through service given in the name of God. The Church is a powerful force for the blessing of its members and all people across the earth. For instance, the Church has done remarkable humanitarian work across the earth. All of that is possible because of the faith of members and of friends that God lives and that the Lord wishes to succor all of those in need whom He can reach through His faithful disciples.

Additionally, it is through the

Church and the ordinances which are in it that the blessings of the sealing power reach into the spirit world. This is a true and living Church, reaching even to those who are no longer living. As you have the faith to find the names of your ancestors, as you go to the house of the Lord to offer them vicarious ordinances, you sustain this great work, whose purpose is to offer salvation to all of Heavenly Father's children who come into this world.

I would like to speak of some of the reasons I see for gratitude for a true and living Church. Then I will suggest some ways in which I see the Church being prepared for the Savior's return. And finally, I will bear my testimony of how I have come to know that this is the true and living Church.

Most of all I am grateful for my experience of the cleansing power available through the ordinances performed by the power of priesthood. I have felt forgiveness and cleansing through baptism by those with authority. I have felt the burning in my bosom that is only possible because of words spoken by servants of God: "Receive the Holy Ghost."

My sense of gratitude stems also from blessings to my family. It is the sealing power and our knowledge of it which changes and transforms our family life here and our expectations for the joy of family life in the world to come. The thought and the hope that I can have eternal relationships carries me through the trials of separation and the loneliness which are part of mortal existence. The promise to the faithful in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that we may have associations and an expansion of families in the eternities. That assurance changes forever and for the better all of our associations in families.

For example, I am at a stage in my life when, because of great distances, I cannot come to know well grandchildren and, in time, great-grandchildren. There are also people who



have never had the opportunity for marriage and parenthood who have the same yearning as I do to somehow be close to family. Because of the restoration of the knowledge of eternal families, we are more hopeful and more kindly in all our family relations. The greatest joys in this life center in families, as they will in the worlds to come. I am so grateful for the assurance I have that if we are faithful, the same sociality which we enjoy here in this life will be forever with us in the world to come, in eternal glory.<sup>2</sup>

I can see evidence of the prophesied perfecting of the Church. For example, as I travel and come to know the members of the Church, I see that there is a steady improvement in their lives. In their simple faith and obedience, the Atonement is changing and edifying the members. Frequently I am in meetings with obviously humble people who are allowed to teach lessons and give sermons which have in them power like that given to Lehi and Nephi, the sons of Helaman. You remember the account:

"And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi did preach unto the Lamanites with such great power and authority, for they had power and

authority given unto them that they might speak, and they also had what they should speak given unto them."<sup>3</sup>

I am confident that the repeated wish of President Gordon B. Hinckley will be granted. He taught that all who come into the Church might be retained in full fellowship if they are nourished by the good word of God. I remember him saying that the last words that he might speak at the end of his service would be "retention, retention, retention." His words live on in the leadership of President Monson and in all of us as we qualify to have the power of a Lehi and a Nephi to nourish with the good word of God. I am confident that you will continue, as I will, to be amazed by humble Latter-day Saints who home teach, visit teach, and speak to their nonmember friends with ever greater power.

For years we have remembered the words of President David O. McKay: "Every member a missionary." I am confident that the day is coming that through the faith of the members we will see increasing numbers of people invited to hear the word of God who will then come into the true and living Church.

There is another improvement I am confident will come. Families across the Church are searching for ways to strengthen and protect their children against the evils around them. In some cases those parents are desperately trying to bring back some in their family who have wandered. I am confident that there will be, increasingly, a reward given by God for their efforts. Those who never give up will find that God never gave up and that He will help them.

Much of that help will come from those called to serve in the Church. The spirit of reaching out will increase so that many will be as the young Bishop Thomas Monson was, inspired with practical ways to invite and encourage those who may, for a time, not recognize the blessings God has



**Members and missionaries of the San Pedro Branch, Belize City Belize District, gather for conference.**

in store for them. President Monson to this day remembers people he labored to rescue when he was their bishop. My hope would be that all of us would have the confidence that God will guide us in reaching out, and back, to those God would have us bring with us as we go home to Him.

Another improvement I see coming in the kingdom is a desire and a capacity to reach out to the poor and those in need. I have seen an amazing increase among the members of the Church in sympathy for victims of natural disasters across the world. In obituary notices I see families asking that donations be sent to the Perpetual Education Fund or to the Church's Humanitarian Fund.

The Prophet Joseph Smith saw that wonderful development. He said that as a person becomes truly converted, he or she will want to range across the earth caring for Heavenly Father's

children.<sup>4</sup> That is already beginning to happen among more of the members of the Church. What is remarkable to me is that the pattern of giving to those in need extends to those who have less themselves and seems to be unaffected by whether we are in good or difficult economic times. That is evidence to me that the Atonement is working ever more effectively among the members.

My testimony that this is the true and living Church began in my childhood. One of my earliest memories is of a conference meeting held not in some place like this but in a rented room of a hotel. A man was speaking whom I did not know, nor do I know his name today. I knew only that he was someone sent to our little district in the mission field by someone who held the priesthood. I do not know what he said. But I received a powerful, certain witness before I was eight,

even before I was baptized, that I was hearing a servant of God in the true Church of Jesus Christ. It was not the rental room nor the size of the congregation, which was small, but it was a witness that I had been blessed at that moment to be in a meeting of the true Church.

When I moved with my family to the organized stakes of the Church in my teen years, for the first time I felt the power of priesthood quorums and of a loving bishop. I still remember and can feel the assurances that came when I sat in a priests quorum next to a bishop and knew that he had the keys of a true judge in Israel.

That same witness came early in my life on two Sundays, one in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the other in Boston, Massachusetts. In each case I was present on the day that a stake was organized from a district. Seemingly ordinary men

whom I knew well were called as stake presidents. I raised my hand on those days as you did today and had a witness come to me that God had called His servants and that I would be blessed by their service and for sustaining them. I have now felt that same miracle countless times across the Church.

I saw in the days and months that followed their being sustained that those stake presidents were lifted up to their callings. I have seen the same miracle in the service of President Monson as he received the call to preside as the prophet and President of the Church and to exercise all the keys of the priesthood in the earth. Revelation and inspiration have come to him in my presence, which confirms to me that God is honoring those keys. I am an eyewitness. They are keys of a priesthood which is, in the Lord's words, "without beginning or end."<sup>5</sup>

I bear you my solemn witness that this is the true and living Church of Jesus Christ. Heavenly Father will answer your fervent prayers to know that for yourself. You can have a witness that the calls which you sustained today were from God. Even more, you can know that within this Church, ordinances are performed which can cleanse souls and bind on earth and in heaven, as they were in the days of Peter, James, and John. Those keys and ordinances are now restored in their fulness through the Prophet Joseph Smith and have been passed on through his successors. Jesus is the Christ. He lives. I know that. I testify that Thomas S. Monson is His living prophet. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true, and it lives on. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. D&C 1:30–33.
2. See D&C 130:2.
3. Helaman 5:18.
4. See *History of the Church*, 4:227.
5. Alma 13:8.