

A Royal Priesthood

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Brethren, as I gaze from one end to the other of this majestic building, I can only say, you are an inspiring sight to behold. It is amazing to realize that in thousands of chapels throughout the world, others of you—holders of the priesthood of God—are receiving this broadcast by way of satellite transmission. Nationalities vary and languages are many, but a common thread binds us together. We have been entrusted to bear the priesthood and to act in the name of God. We are the recipients of a sacred trust. Much is expected of us.

We who hold the priesthood of God and honor it are among those who have been reserved for this special period in history. The Apostle Peter described us in the second chapter of 1 Peter, the ninth verse: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an

holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

How might you and I qualify ourselves to be worthy of that designation, “a royal priesthood”? What are the characteristics of a true son of the living God? Tonight I would like us to consider just some of those very characteristics.

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May I suggest that first of all every one of us develop **the mark of vision**. One writer said that the door of history turns on small hinges, and so do people’s lives. If we were to apply that maxim to our lives, we could say that we are the result of many small decisions. In effect, we are the product of our choices. We must develop the capacity to recall the past, to evaluate the present, and to look into the future in order to accomplish in our lives what the Lord would have us do.

You young men holding the Aaronic Priesthood should have the ability to envision the day when you will hold the Melchizedek Priesthood and then prepare yourselves as deacons, as teachers, as priests to receive the holy Melchizedek Priesthood of God. You have the responsibility to be ready, when you receive the Melchizedek Priesthood, to respond

to a call to serve as a missionary by accepting it and then fulfilling it. How I pray that every boy and every man will have **the mark of vision**.

The second principle I should like to emphasize as a characteristic of a true priesthood holder of God is **the mark of effort**. It is not enough to want to make the effort and to say we’ll make the effort. We must actually *make* the effort. It’s in the *doing*, not just the *thinking*, that we accomplish our goals. If we constantly put our goals off, we will never see them fulfilled. Someone put it this way: Live only for tomorrow, and you will have a lot of empty yesterdays today.¹

In July of 1976, runner Garry Bjorklund was determined to qualify for the U.S. Olympic team’s 10,000-meter race which would be run at the Montreal Olympics. Halfway through the grinding qualifying race, however, he lost his left shoe. What would you and I do if that were our experience? I suppose he could have given up and stopped. He could have blamed his bad luck and lost the opportunity of participating in the greatest race of his life, but this champion athlete did not do that. He ran on without his shoe. He knew that he would have to run faster than he had ever run in his life. He knew that his competitors now had an advantage that they did not have at the beginning of the race. Over that cinder track he ran, with one shoe on and one shoe off, finishing third and qualifying for the opportunity to participate in the race for the gold medal. His own running time was the best he had ever recorded. He put forth the effort necessary to achieve his goal.

As priesthood holders, we may find that there are times in our lives when we falter, when we become weary or fatigued, or when we suffer a disappointment or a heartache. When that happens, I would hope that we will persevere with even greater effort toward our goal.



At one time or another each of us will be called to fill a position in the Church, whether as a deacons quorum president, a teachers quorum secretary, a priesthood adviser, a class teacher, a bishop. I could name more, but you get the picture. I was just 22 years of age when I was called to be the bishop of the Sixth-Seventh Ward in Salt Lake City. With 1,080 members in the ward, a great deal of effort was required to make certain that every matter which needed to be handled was taken care of and every member of the ward felt included and watched over. Although the assignment was monumental in scope, I did not let it overwhelm me. I went to work, as did others, and did all I could to serve. Each of us can do the same, regardless of the calling or assignment.

Just last year I decided to see how many residential dwellings were still standing from the period between 1950 and 1955 when I served as bishop of that same area. I drove slowly around each of the blocks that

once comprised the ward. I was surprised to observe in my search that of all the houses and apartment buildings where our 1,080 members had lived, only three dwellings were still standing. At one of those houses, the grass was overgrown, the trees unpruned, and I found no one was living there. Of the other two houses remaining, one was boarded up and unoccupied, and the other housed some sort of a modest business office.

I parked my car, turned off the ignition, and just sat there for a long while. I could picture in my mind each house, each apartment building, each member who lived there. While the homes and the buildings were gone, the memories were still very vivid concerning the families who resided in each dwelling. I thought of the words of the author James Barrie, who wrote that God gave us memories that we might have June roses in the December of our lives.² How grateful I was for the opportunity to serve in that assignment. Such can be

the blessing of each of us if we put forth in our assignments our very best efforts.

The mark of effort is required of every priesthood holder.

The third principle I would like to emphasize is **the mark of faith**. We must have faith in ourselves, faith in the ability of our Heavenly Father to bless us and to guide us in our endeavors. Many years ago the writer of a psalm wrote a beautiful truth: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes."³ In other words, let us put our confidence in the ability of the Lord to guide us. Friendships, we know, may alter and change, but the Lord is constant.

Shakespeare, in his play *King Henry the Eighth*, taught this truth through Cardinal Wolsey—a man who enjoyed great prestige and pride because of his friendship with the king. When the friendship ended, Cardinal Wolsey was stripped of his

authority, resulting in a loss of prominence and prestige. He was one who had gained everything and then lost all. In the sorrow of his heart, he spoke a real truth to his servant, Cromwell. He said:

*O Cromwell, Cromwell!
Had I but served my God with half
the zeal
I served my king, He would not in
mine age
Have left me naked to mine
enemies.*⁴

I trust we shall have **the mark of faith** in every heart represented here tonight.

I add to my list **the mark of virtue**. The Lord indicated that we should let virtue garnish our thoughts unceasingly.⁵

I recall a priesthood meeting held in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City when I was a holder of the Aaronic Priesthood. The President of the Church was speaking to the priesthood, and he made a statement I have never forgotten. He said, in essence, that men who commit sexual sin or other sins do not do so in the twinkling of an eye. He emphasized that our actions are preceded by our thoughts, and when we commit sin, it is because we have first thought of committing that particular sin. Then the President declared that the way to avoid sin is to keep our thinking pure. The scripture tells us that as we think in our hearts, so are we.⁶ We must have **the mark of virtue**.

If we are to be missionaries in the kingdom of our Heavenly Father, we must be entitled to the companionship of His Holy Spirit, and we have been told precisely that His Spirit will not dwell in impure or unholy tabernacles.

Finally, may I add **the mark of prayer**. The desire to communicate with one's Heavenly Father is a mark of a true priesthood holder of God.



As we offer unto the Lord our family and our personal prayers, let us do so with faith and trust in Him. Let us remember the injunction of the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews: "For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."⁷ If any of us has been slow to hearken to the counsel to pray always, there is no finer hour to begin than now. William Cowper declared, "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees."⁸ Those who feel that prayer might denote a physical weakness should consider that a man never stands taller than when he is upon his knees.

May we ever remember:

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed,
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast. . . .*

*O thou by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way!*

*The path of prayer thyself hast trod;
Lord, teach us how to pray.*⁹

As we cultivate **the mark of prayer**, we will receive the blessings our Heavenly Father has for us.

In conclusion, may we have *vision*. May we put forth *effort*. May we exemplify *faith* and *virtue* and ever make *prayer* a part of our lives. Then we shall indeed be a royal priesthood. This would be my prayer, my personal prayer this evening, and I offer it from my heart in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Meredith Willson and Franklin Lacey, *The Music Man* (1957).
2. See Laurence J. Peter, comp., *Peter's Quotations: Ideas for Our Time* (1977), 335.
3. Psalm 118:8-9.
4. Act 3, scene 2, lines 455-58.
5. See D&C 121:45.
6. See Proverbs 23:7.
7. Hebrews 11:6.
8. In William Neil, comp., *Concise Dictionary of Religious Quotations* (1974), 144.
9. "Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire," *Hymns*, no. 145.