

Official Visit to Corinthian Lodge No. 513  
January 23, 2014.

**“It is great to give...but even better when given properly”**

I offer the following quote from George Eliot (aka Mary Ann Evans, a Victorian novelist in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century) and pray this cannot be said about what I am about to say; **“Blessed is the man who, having nothing to say, abstains from giving us worthy evidence of the fact”**.

It had a deep ‘clanging’ sound, almost something you would expect to hear on the pier of a small harbour. But there it was on the street where I lived in Hamilton. That unique sound signaled the arrival of the fishmonger’s truck. The driver was a friendly chap with apple red cheeks and a very thick east coast accent. It was somehow fitting, seeing as how the name on the side of the truck read “Atlantic Fish Market”.

My mother and the other women would rally on the street at the clang of the bell to see what their east coast friend was offering. For me and the other kids, we enjoyed seeing the door of the truck fly open and frosty air break forth into the warm summer day. The driver would stand at the back of the truck and hold up beautiful fillets of all different types of fish. You could watch him work his magic with his sharp knives as he effortlessly prepared each person’s order to their particular specifications. It was captivating and mesmerizing.

What I remember to this day beyond the rich, fresh sea-salt smell and the frosty air was his craftsmanship.

For him, this was his craft and he was very skilled at it. You could see the pride he took in his work, from the first stroke of his blade to the last bow he tied on each customer's order.

The steady and loyal customers that patronized his truck were a testament to his quality product and his quality service.

My mother would say that he was more expensive than the next best alternative, but she also said... 'it was worth it'. I guess the price becomes less of a concern when the product is of such superior quality. It is something you simply have to have.

The travelling fishmonger may be a thing of the past, but the lessons of that experience are not lost on me. I hope you don't conclude from this preamble that fish from a truck tastes better, because the lesson is; "A quality product and quality service performed by a craftsman who takes pride in his work is extremely desirable". Always!

Now we fast forward to the present. Do you know what the biggest complaint is levied at contractors? You might think its price, and that may be one of the complaints, but the frontrunner is poor craftsmanship and substandard quality of work. As an example, if I pay a contractor to re-shingle my roof and he gives me a terrific deal on the price but I have to buy buckets to catch the drops when it rains, then it isn't a very good deal at all, is it?

So what has all this to do with Freemasonry? To my way of thinking, quite a lot actually and please allow me to explain.

To recognize and acknowledge how Freemasonry has a product, I think we need to examine a few of the similarities between the contemporary business environment and ourselves. First, I think we have to agree that our system of lodges is somewhat similar to the structure of a business franchise. Our Grand Lodge of AF & AM of Canada in the Province of Ontario is the head office. Our Grand Master is the CEO and the 44 DDGMs are regional supervisors. Each Lodge is 'franchised' by a Warrant and as such, follows the rules as set forth in the 'Franchise Agreement'; our Constitution.

The employees, or as we prefer to call them; 'members' offer to our candidates, or 'customers', a product known as our Ritual. A series of lectures designed to cultivate and enlighten the mind, culminating in making good men better.

Lets consider a franchise product for a moment; the 'Big Mac' to McDonald's is what our Ritual is to Freemasonry. In a manner of speaking, it is a uniform product, easily identified and consistent across all franchises. The only difference is that one is nutritious and satisfying for the mind and soul, while the other keeps you awake at night with indigestion.

If the Big Mac were something I enjoyed and desired, then I would expect it to meet the same level of quality across all locations that I visit. The same should be said for our Ritual. A quality product offered consistently and uniformly at all lodges across our jurisdiction.

We don't have to give a second thought to creating a better product. We already have it. It is contained within the pages of the "Book of the Work"; the teachings from an ancient and honourable society for the betterment of those who chose enlightenment and desire knowledge.

The challenge as I see it lies with the execution and delivery. Like the fishmonger and the tradesperson, it comes down to pride in our work and the quality of our craftsmanship. We must honestly evaluate and take a very close look at ourselves to see if we are applying our very best and if we bring value to our Ritual; to our product.

I recently attended a midterm meeting with the Grand Master in Ajax and one of the DDGMs stated quite frankly that 'money matters' were in his opinion, one of the biggest concerns facing lodges these days. He may be right and I am sure most lodges would unanimously concur. However, I would beg to differ and although it may be a matter of semantics, I think it's all in how you look at it.

At the very core of what we do is our Ritual. Our Rites and Ceremonies are what defines us and prescribes our unique identity. If we do it well....and I mean really well, then the value is realized...a great value...and hence, a product worth having. And something worth having is worth paying for or saving for.

When holding membership in a Craft Lodge is without a doubt a value to covet, then we are justified in charging dues and initiation fees that reflect that value. Consequently, an improved revenue stream will go a long way to solving a lot of financial challenges, both in the short and long run. This whole approach will undoubtedly take some time to implement and manage, but I believe the effort exerted to improve the quality of our work will net the desired results.

I realize there are those who may scoff at this concept, but ask yourself if your membership is getting what they are paying for. I will suggest to you that there might be those who don't expect much, so a small dues amount is justified to say they are members of a Masonic order. At the same time, there are those who perceive greater value for their dues dollar, regardless of the amount. In any event, the extraordinary value we deliver to our members should be a small reminder that dues we charge are well worth it.

What this all comes down to is a will and desire to be the very best we can possibly be.

This as we all know, does not come without a lot of effort and dare I use the word, 'practice'. But it's true. You know it and I know it. We are custodians of a great trust and it is our responsibility to present our Ritual as it was intended.

We refer to our Masonic Bodies as 'Craft Lodges'. This is most appropriate as the definition of 'Craft' is "an activity involving skill in making things". Do we live up to the reputation of true Craftsmen? Are we applying the necessary skill that only comes from 'repeated efforts alone?'

I understand that some of the subjects I address at my official visits may hit a cord with some, but I truly believe in what I am saying. I am drawing from my personal observations with a goal of stimulating interest, widening perspectives and challenging some beliefs. By no means is my presentation this evening pointed in any particular direction; it is however intended to stimulate dialogue and bring all lodges to consider their next steps.

I am sure you gathered from my opening statement that what I really meant to say was; "It is great to give ***Ritual***...but even better when given properly". With the current book of the work, time given to practice, enthusiastic and patient leadership, you and your members will present and enjoy a product of immeasurable value that will leave a legacy for future generations to emulate.

And the words you have all been waiting for; “before I conclude my brethren”, allow me to quote Albert Pike for your consideration and contemplation:

***"He who endeavors to serve, to benefit, and improve the world, is like a swimmer, who struggles against a rapid current, in a river lashed into angry waves by the winds. Often they roar over his head, often they beat him back and baffle him. Most men yield to the stress of the current... Only here and there the stout, strong heart and vigorous arms struggle on toward ultimate success."***

Thank you for your kind attention.

Presented by:  
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