

## **2000 Grand Oration of Grand Orator George Miller, Jr.**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, distinguished brothers and brethren all.

In considering what I think could be worth due consideration for today, I was reminded of my high school days, which were just a few years ago, (about 50) and in those days we studied the play, "Hamlet," by William Shakespeare. Perhaps you are not a big fan of the "Bard of Avon," but most people are familiar with some portion of his writings, and especially the soliloquy of Hamlet, which starts, "To be or not to be, that is the question." The continuation of this Hamlet thought goes on to say, "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or, by opposing, end them."

I propose that we, as Masons, need to decide whether we really want to be, or not to be! That, indeed is the question. I ask you to consider; does everyone in this room (in other words, do you) wish to be a part of the joy of refilling the cup of "Masonic Membership?" Then let's begin by talking positive, not negative. We have the most desirable fraternity in the world to offer to our friends and relatives, but no one wants to belong to what they have heard is a dying breed. Let's get rid of the idea we are not going to survive as a viable institution. I am a firm believer that we have every opportunity of not only surviving, but of growing by large numbers.

However, this opportunity to grow and return to numbers of the past will not happen without the dedication of every possible brother of our great fraternity. Yes, that means you, and all the members of your lodge; and me, and all the members of my lodge. When we need to compete for the time and efforts of the prospective members we would like to see as brothers, we had better offer something of more interest than television, sports activities, the internet, or whatever may be calling upon their free time, aside from family and/or church activities. We must have meetings that leave a feeling upon departure that says, "That was fun and interesting. I'm anxious to attend the next meeting. If that's not occurring with your members, who can blame them for finding other things to do?"

Use your Lodge Education Officer to offer a full range of programs that are of entertaining and interesting content. I'm reminded of the era when I first entered the doors of the Masonic Fraternity. At that time, after each stated meeting, there was a showing of a Laurel and Hardy comedy, or a portion of one, to be continued at the next stated meeting. Those who didn't particularly care for the film (these days videos are more common) usually played cribbage or just chatted over coffee and a very light snack. An inexpensive piece of Masonic trivia, or a silly nothing of a trophy, were offered for those cribbage players who entered competition over a period of several meetings. Trivia or Scrabble, or whatever imagination can offer, may be more to the liking of your members, but the important thing is to offer something of a continuing nature that will create desire to see the next phase. Remember the Saturday serials at the local movie? No one wanted to miss the next installment! How about using a Masonic trivia game of your own creation with prizes-given for winners?

This type of fun and education could certainly lead to a more informed membership, who would be better prepared to answer the questions of prospective members. Or better yet, our members would be prepared to present the true facts of masonry if an occasion should arise when a critic offers opinions that are not true.

Usually most criticism of Masonry can be blamed on lack of knowledge of the Masonic Fraternity.

It's a fact that there are those in the world about us who would like to see Masonry disappear. There is a far right movement in some religious groups, making anti-masonic speeches, declarations and sermons on the "evils" of belonging to a Masonic Lodge. There are many who, through misinformation, or their own private agendas, are leading others to believe false allegations about Masonry. Most of us have probably heard about; devil-worship, sacrifices, praying to Lucifer, and the "Higher Degrees" to which only the "chosen few" have knowledge, rather than telling all Masons about these practices. Believe me, my Brothers, I have given a fair amount of my time listening to these types of false accusations, innuendoes and outright lies about Masonry, and I am dedicated to telling the truth about our fraternity whenever presented with the opportunity. But I also believe an informed general membership about the fact that this is happening is essential to our continued growth.

Recently I attended a presentation at a Minneapolis area church where our Worshipful Brother, Reverend Terry Tilton, had the opportunity to speak as a proponent of Masonry. There was also a presenter of anti-masonic information who was given an equal time slot of about 30 minutes. The information being presented of "anti" nature was, as is often the case, taken out of context. In several references the information presented was from a non recognized source, and even the presenter, when questioned, didn't know the author. But if people can find it in writing, they have a tendency to believe it. When it's presented out of context, the meaning can be easily changed or misinterpreted. In my opinion, Worshipful Brother Tilton did a spectacular job of presenting Masonry, but when it seemed the mind-set of many non-masons present was, "Don't confuse us with the facts, because we already have decided." It probably would have taken hours...days or eternity to reach agreement about the real truth. I only point this out to illustrate that there are those who believe these anti-masonic presentations because there is almost an endless stream of so called Masonic authorities who have written volumes about the fraternity. If we compare this untold number of books about Masonry with what is usually just one book of religious guidance, it is difficult for the non-mason to understand how there can be differing opinions on what Masonry really represents. The hardest thing I've run into in presenting Masonry is to help people understand that Masonry is to each individual man, nothing more than what he interprets it to be, but always the total, "Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God." Unfortunately, non-Masons seem to be giving more effort to tell others certain untruths, or innuendoes, than we Masons are doing to tell the world the truth about Masonry. We have been our own worst enemies, by being silent, secretive and unknowledgeable.

We have a challenge from the world about us, and in particular certain far right religious groups, to disseminate information about the real message of Masonry, "The Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God." But this job will not be done by others! How could we expect it to be? There are very few non-masonic persons who can tell OUR friends, neighbors and relatives about Masonry in such a way as to influence them to join. So who's left to do the necessary job? You and me! That's right, you and me. And, unfortunately, it may not be those brothers who are not here and, certainly, not those who we never see at any Masonic event. A few years ago our

DeMolay were touting what I believe to be a great slogan. "If it is to be --- it is up to me. " Do you believe it? Are We up to the challenge? We need an informed membership!

The good news is that several of our lodges are making a difference in what has been a downward trend in membership numbers. New concepts in presenting Masonry to prospects, new methods of attracting prospects and new approaches to the entire Masonic Family relationships are starting to show results. If you want specifics as to who and how, ask around and listen to the good news of those who are making it happen. There is change in the air. Not any form of change in what we stand for, or in any of our tenets, but a definite change in how we go about doing things.

There is one aspect of change being presented however, with which I have great concern- from my personal point of view. Let me drop back a few years in my Masonic quest for light. Back in 1966, I asked a fellow employee of the company I worked for about becoming a Shriner. I couldn't figure out why no one had ever asked me to become a Shriner. The American Legion, the V.F.W., the Foresters, the Jaycees and the rest of several organizations were after my membership and I joined several, but not one soul ever asked me to become a Shriner, and I asked him why, and was there a reason? He simply stated, "You just asked the magic question." Then came an explanation of what I had to do including that I had to first be a Mason. And, even at the age of 33, I didn't have a clue what he was talking about. What's even worse, neither did he have much of a clue as to what Masonry really was. Thankfully he referred me to another employee of the company who could answer my first questions and keep me interested.

The rest is history and I fell in love with Masonry and some of the other Masonic related bodies; Scottish Rite, Job's Daughters and DeMolay, and yes, Eastern Star, and I didn't join the Shrine until a couple of years later. It's important to note that I firmly believe, if I had not had to be a Mason first I honestly wonder if I would be here speaking to you, or ever would have found one of the most solidly bonding forces, within and without the confines of my personal family. AND I developed a firmer belief than ever, that my personal relationship with God WITHIN MY CHURCH was stronger than ever. Just a side note for those who really know about me and whatever accomplishments I may have achieved, I didn't join Eastern Star until ten years after I became a Mason, but that too, should have been sooner, had I only known! When my late wife was deathly ill with breast cancer, and in hospice care by me at our home, some extremely good sisters of the Star saved me from complete exhaustion by sitting with her enough so I could get rest and do certain chores that had to be done. I will never forget them.

It is distressing to me, under the scenario that I stated a minute ago, that had I not been required to be a Mason before becoming a Shriner, I might have foregone those first steps, and never known the joys of serving Masonry and those appendant bodies, which I have come to love. And the thousands of friendships I have because of them might never be. I am an active Shriner, and proud to be so, but I am very concerned about an Imperial Divan Leader who seems determined to allow "social memberships" in the Shrine, with no requirement for Blue Lodge or Rite membership necessary under that title or affiliation. It would seem to me that if membership numbers are the only reason for suggesting this drastic change, perhaps the best interests of all,

could be better served by the Shrine promoting Masonry as a cornerstone or building block to Shrinedom.

There are some well-meaning leaders in our fraternity who may also need to take a long soulful look at their views on Shrine activities. Harsh words, or acts of retaliation, no matter how well intended, are only roads to conflict, not resolution. There seems to be a note of "them" and "us" cropping up in the things I have read and copied from the internet sources available. That is not a Masonic answer to the perceived problem of declining membership. A Masonic attitude should be positive, not negative, about our fraternity. How can we expect others to wish to join any organization on which the main subject always presented is declining membership?

I propose to you, my Brothers, that our Masonic glass is not half empty, but rather it is half full, and it is up us in the full portion to get off dead center and fill the other half again. How many of us present here today know two men who ought to be Masons? Well, what are you waiting for? You now have permission to ask them to consider Masonry! Don't walk, and don't run either, but make a determined effort that before this year is over, either both of them, or a substitute for them, will be under your guidance to becoming a Mason. It matters not whether it's your lodge, or any other lodge. Just so we get them moving toward the rewards that I, and I trust you, have received by being a member of this fantastic fraternity.

This Grand Lodge has a fabulous library and bookstore of Masonic information that is truthful and helpful in overcoming any objections that may occur. There are helpful videos to explain Masonry to the uninformed. There are tremendous books that ought to be in each of our personal libraries, which anyone can read. Just be careful that at a public library, the books obtained are written by true knowledgeable Masonic writers, not some persons who claim to be "In the know" but are out to defame Masonry.

Masonry is salvageable. Masonry is worth saving. Masonry in Minnesota, and who knows where else, can only be saved by you and me. And we are only going to do it by being committed. And who knows what man may be directed away from other undesirable fates, and instead, direct his energies toward helping his fellowman, because of Masonry?

Today is the first day of the rest of your life, don't let it be gone without making an effort to save this fraternity and the entire Masonic Family.

I will close with the following verses to consider as your day progresses.

#### At Day's End by John Hall

Is anybody happier because you passed his way?

Does anyone remember that you spoke to him today?

The day is almost over, and its toiling time is through; is there anyone to utter now a kindly word of you?

Can you say tonight, in parting with the day that's slipping fast, that you helped a single brother of the many that you passed?

Is a single heart rejoicing over what you did or said?

Does the man whose hopes were fading, now with courage look ahead? Did you waste the day, or lose it? Was it well or sorely spent?

Did you leave a trail of kindness, or a scar of discontent?

As you close your eyes in slumber, do you think that God will say, "You have earned one more tomorrow by the work you did today"?