Answer to the Masonic Monday Question for the week of January 24, 2011

Dear Masonic Student,

Our question this week had to do with Candles, the candles we find in a Lodge Room, be they actual candles, or electric candles.

This is the question we had for the week:

**In addition to providing illumination, candles in a Lodge Room are emblematic and symbolic of what?**

Brother Tim Fleischer, of Salado Masonic Lodge #296, in Salado, TX went in the right answer this week.

Also Brother Jerret Thompson who answered last week’s question forgot to send in the name of his Lodge, but he did send it later: He’s from Nicollet Lodge #54 (a find Lodge to visit if you get the chance) in St. Peter, MN

Here it the answer I have for this week. It comes from Freemasons’ Guide and Compendium by Bernard E. Jones.

**Candles**
The candles in the lodge are much more than a means of illumination. they are important symbols, with a long and attractive history. The candle came into the speculative lodge not only from the hall of the guild; it came from the votive offering burning before a shrine centuries ago. **Its physical light is the emblem of the spiritual. The burning candle at the medieval altar and shrine carried with it the idea of consecration, of the making and keeping of vows, of gratitude for mercies which had been vouchsafed.**

We have already pointed out that each of the craft guilds maintained an altar in a nearby church and kept it supplied with candles, which were paid for by fines and fees obtained from its members. Early fourteenth-century records reveal that what was probably a religious fraternity among the masons at Lincoln "set up the candle of the Guild." By one of its rules: "Whoever is elected Graceman [principal officer] and refuses to take the office shall pay two pounds of wax, and whoever being elected Warden or Deacon refuses the office shall give one pound." From the custom of maintaining the candle, a guild fraternity became to be spoken of familiarly as le cierge, 'the candle.' Occasionally, a Master Mason taking an apprentice had to "pay 40> to the maintaining of the candle." It is easy to see that the lodge custom of burning three candles— particularly three—is originally of religious significance and has come from church and guild, whatever the modern masonic interpretation may or may not be.

The burning of candles in holy places seems to have been a heathen idea originally, and there was great opposition to it in the Early Christian Church. But Jerome (a.d. 340-420) tells us that, throughout the churches of the East when the Gospel was read, candles were lighted, even though the sun were shining, not for the purpose of driving
away darkness, but as an outward sign of gladness and as symbols of that light of which we read in the Psalter, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm cxix, 105.)

Men's superstitious minds in medieval days believed there was mud virtue in the lighted candle. Here, for example, are some lines from sixteenth-century verse by Barnabe Googe:

... a wondrous force and might Doth in these Candles lie, which if at any time they light They sure beleve that neyther storme or tempest dare abide, Nor thunder in the skies be heard, nor any Devils spite, Nor fearefull sprites that walke by night, nor hurts of frost or haile.

There were special (and beautiful although highly superstitious) prayers in the pre-Reformation Church for the hallowing of candles upon Candelmas day:

. .. bless thou this creature of a waxen taper ... that in what places it be lighted or set, the Divel may avoid out of those habitacions, and tremble for fear, and fly away discouraged. . . . Vouchsafe to blesse and sanctifye, and with the Candle of heavenly benediction, to lighten these tapers.

The Feast of the Purification was observed with so many lights that it came to be called Candlemas. The false or dummy candle often seen in lodges had an early counterpart, for sometimes in medieval churches a little candle was made to appear a big one by mounting it on a post painted to resemble a candle. Because of its falsity, this came to be known as a 'Judas,' the 'Judas to the Pascall' being the dummy carrying the paschal or Easter candle on or near the altar.

The candles that lit up the eighteenth-century lodges were thick and heavy, ornamented sometimes with "symbolic reliefs in white wax pressed on to the candle." If the lodges did not provide their own candles, then the innkeeper did so, and he charged so many pence per candle per hour for those kept burning during lodge time.

A freemason would hardly expect to find any association of the candle with secrecy, but the old and curious metaphor "Tace is Latin for candle," met in old-fashioned literature, means literally 'It is discreet to be silent.' The arms of the United Grand Lodge of England bear the motto, *Audi Vide Tace*—'hear, see, be silent.'

Fraternal regards,
Ed

Ed Halpaus
Grand Lodge Education Officer
Grand Lodge A.F. & A. M. of MN

**Masonic research is Fun!**