

Friday, April 5

First Day

old cities of Kirtland and Nauvoo, rising from town governments to civic centers. They exemplified the words of Isaiah of old:

... We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.

Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. (Isaiah 26:1,2.)

In the study of their fields and gardens, one is reminded of the story of the beautiful garden found in the *Odyssey* of Homer, which some say, is a reflection of the tradition of the Garden of Eden. Certainly they illustrate what Goethe said in the last scene of *Faust*:

I found God in trying to make the earth beautiful.

The Kingdom of God a Concrete Reality

And now to conclude. The Prophet established the Church of Christ as it was designed by the Master. As Jesus set forth the reality of the kingdom of God as spiritual and subjective—as “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost,” it is also true that he set forth the establishment of this kingdom as a concrete, organic reality, small indeed at its beginning. So today is the Church separate from civic and political government and composed of the people who follow his teachings. This is a glorious part of my theme which time forbids my amplifying. We read in the gospel of Luke how Jesus chose twelve apostles who were willing to act as his heralds of the kingdom; and with the seventy, these were sent into the world to teach the gospel. So in this day, after the Church was organized, the Twelve and the seventy were sent forth to evangelize the world. The Church is a coherent organization, which can be coterminous with the nation or the whole world, but is not dependent upon, nor derived from existing forms of civilization. It is the organized concrete expression of the kingdom of God.

Paul the apostle made this point clear as recorded in the first chapter of Colossians:

And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:17,18.)

ELDER MARION G. ROMNEY

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve Apostles

This morning we listened to the prophet of the Lord say that we are living in the time when the prophecy,

... the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. (Isaiah 29:14.)

is being fulfilled. This afternoon we heard Elder Joseph F. Merrill of the Council of the Twelve paint a word picture of some of the evil

things rampant in the world today. It is my firm conviction that if the Latter-day Saints are to go successfully through the crisis in which we now find the world, they must have in their hearts the certainty that the early pioneers had, to which Elder Widstoe referred this morning. We can have that certainty because we have the right to be taught by the same power which taught them.

"We Have the Holy Ghost"

On one occasion the Prophet Joseph Smith was in Washington talking to a President of the United States. I believe it was President Van Buren. The President of the United States said to the Prophet of the Living God, "What is the difference between you"—meaning the Church he had founded under the inspiration of God—"and the rest of the Christian world?" And the Prophet Joseph answered that question in one sentence, "We have the Holy Ghost."

The Saints who crossed the plains almost a hundred years ago obtained their certainty by the power that Joseph Smith referred to, the Holy Ghost. He teaches us direct from God.

Some people have said that Joseph Smith was an unlearned man. He was an unlearned man in the things of the world, but the day he came out of the grove, following the first vision, he was the most learned person in the world in the things that count. When he came out of that grove, he knew more than all the world put together about the great question of the resurrection, which had been argued from the time man began to think seriously, because he had seen standing before him, the resurrected Christ. When he came out of that grove, he knew more about the nature of God than all the world. There had been many books written; philosophers had spent their lives trying to find out the nature of God, but when God took Joseph in hand to teach him he cut through all material things and taught Joseph the truth about these and many other important things.

Now, every member of this Church has had hands laid upon his head and has listened to words about like this, "Receive the Holy Ghost." And every Latter-day Saint has the right to receive the Holy Ghost and be guided, through these perilous times in which we live, by that Spirit.

There are two sources, and as far as I know only two sources, from which we may expect to gain guidance that will safely bring us through. One source is through our righteous living, so that we can have the dictates of the Holy Spirit, and the other source is from the words spoken by the men whom we shall sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators here in this conference.

Importance of Attending Sacrament Meetings

There are two or three things that are very necessary for Latter-day Saints to do in order to have the Holy Spirit, and I want to talk this afternoon about one of them. It is partaking of the sacrament. In the fifty-ninth section of the Doctrine and Covenants, where the

Lord specifies certain commandments especially applicable to the land of Zion, he says among other things:

And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day. (D. & C. 59:9.)

The Melchizedek Priesthood quorum presidencies throughout the Church are requested to report to the general priesthood committee of the Council of the Twelve the performance of their quorum members with respect to various Church activities. One of the activities reported is attendance at sacrament meetings; another is keeping the Sabbath day holy.

In reviewing some of these reports, my interest has been challenged by the great number reported to be keeping the Sabbath day holy, who do not attend sacrament meetings. Now, of course, I realize that there are circumstances under which Church members may and do keep the Sabbath day holy without attending these meetings, but in the absence of compelling circumstances, I feel that proper observance of the Sabbath day requires attendance at sacrament meetings.

I wish that more of the members of the Church would regularly attend them. It would be to their own spiritual well-being, and I fervently seek the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit while I attempt to tell you why.

In the first place, we are under solemn obligation to attend sacrament meetings, for the Lord has required all who believe and are baptized in his name to do so. It is evident that he also instructed the original Twelve when he first instituted the sacrament, for we read that following Peter's great Pentecostal sermon,

. . . they that gladly received his word were baptized: . . . And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:41-42.)

We learn from the Book of Mormon, where the record is more complete, that the resurrected Lord gave specific instructions to his disciples among the Nephites that they should administer the sacrament unto all those who should believe and be baptized in his name, and ". . . this shall ye always observe to do," (III Nephi 18:6.), he admonished them. ". . . Behold, ye shall meet together oft" (III Nephi 18:22), he said unto the multitude, and it is recorded that ". . . they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine in remembrance of the Lord Jesus." (Moroni 6:6.)

In this dispensation, in the revelation in which the Lord pointed out the day on which the Church was to be organized, he also said:

It is expedient that the church meet together often to partake of bread and wine in the remembrance of the Lord Jesus. (D. & C. 20:75.)

A little later he fixed the time and frequency of such meetings with this instruction:

... thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day. (*Ibid.*, 59:9.)

Obedience to Commandments Brings Growth

I believe that every time we act pursuant to a commandment of the Lord, we comply with some fundamental principles of growth, for he never requires us to do a useless thing. Rarely, however, are the purposes for which a commandment is given and the beneficial results which follow obedience thereto set forth with such clarity as they are with respect to this commandment.

In explanation of it, we are taught that the bread is to be eaten in remembrance of the body of the Savior, and that the water is to be drunk in remembrance of his blood which was shed for us. It follows, then, that this sacred ordinance is to direct our thoughts to the central and most important events of earth's history, the suffering, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

It has always seemed significant to me that from the earliest times until today, there has been among all peoples who have believed and accepted the gospel, a frequently repeated ordinance pointing their minds to these great events. In the early morning of earth's temporal existence, at the Lord's command, Adam built an altar and offered sacrifice, although at the time he knew not why. As a consequence of his obedience and for his enlightenment, an angel appeared unto him and

... spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth. (Pearl of Great Price, Moses 5:7.)

The sacrificing of the firstlings of their flocks by true believers in Christ, in contemplation of his great sacrifice, then future, continued until his death. The thoughts of his people were thus repeatedly pointed forward to his great atonement. Since his death, the minds of his followers have been turned back to that event by the sacrament.

Partaking of Sacrament a Spiritualizing Experience

Now partaking of the sacrament is not to be a mere passive experience. We are not to remember the Lord's suffering and death only as we may remember some purely secular historical event. Participating in the sacrament service is meant to be a vital and a spiritualizing experience. Speaking of it, the Savior said:

... And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me. (III Nephi 18:7.)

In order to testify, one's mind has to function, and it must be concentrated upon the thing to be testified. And we are not only to partake of the emblems of the sacrament in remembrance of the Redeemer, testifying that we do always remember him, but we are also thereby to witness unto the Father that we are willing to take upon us

the name of his Son and that we will keep his commandments. This amounts to a virtual renewal of the covenant of baptism, for you will recall that candidates for baptism are, among other things, to

. . . witness before the church that they . . . are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end. (D. & C. 20:37.)

Now there is a doctrine abroad in the world today which teaches that the physical emblems of the sacrament are transformed into the flesh and blood of Jesus. We do not teach such a doctrine, for we know that any transformation which comes from the administration of the sacrament takes place in the souls of those who understandingly partake of it. It is the participating individuals who are affected, and they are affected in a most marvelous way, for they are given the Spirit of the Lord to be with them. This is promised in the sacrament prayers. The sacredness and importance of these prayers is evident from the fact that they have always been given to the Church verbatim. In this dispensation they were dictated to the Prophet Joseph Smith by direct revelation from heaven. In them, in addition to the promise, the whole purpose of the sacrament is set forth. Let me repeat to you the blessing on the bread:

O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them: that they may always have his spirit to be with them. Amen. (D. & C. 20:77.)

Companionship of Holy Spirit Promised

While instructing his Nephite disciples with respect to the sacrament, Jesus twice repeated to them the promise:

. . . And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you. (III Nephi 18:7, 11.)

It is the overwhelming importance of realizing this great promise that makes regular attendance at sacrament meetings so imperative, for if we can but have the companionship of his holy spirit, we shall be able, as the Lord admonishes, to keep ourselves more fully unspotted from the world, and furthermore we shall be neither deceived nor disturbed in our faith by the evil about us.

Now, my brethren and sisters, may the Lord shock us into an appreciation of what it means to attend regularly sacrament meetings and acceptably participate in the sacrament service. If we will increase our attendance from about twenty percent to forty percent, we shall double our spiritual power for righteousness in the world, which, may the Lord help us to do, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.