

Elder Henry D. Taylor, Assistant to the Twelve, will now address us. He will

be followed by Elder L. Tom Perry of the Council of the Twelve.

## Elder Henry D. Taylor

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

In a recent meeting, President Marion G. Romney gave a message which impressed me greatly. First he said, "It has been, and now is, the desire and the objective of the Church to obtain from fast offerings the necessary funds to meet the cash needs of the welfare program." And he said, "We can, we ought, and we must do better." Then from Brother Romney came this comforting assurance: "*If we will double our fast offerings we shall increase our prosperity, both spiritually and temporally.*" This the Lord has promised, this has been the record."

### Fast day observance

Many years ago a day was chosen and designated upon which to observe the law of the fast. A very important feature in this observance was, and now is, a liberal contribution to the fast offering fund. The policy of the Church today has been stated as follows:

"The first Sunday of each month is usually designated as a day of fasting and prayer on which a special testimony meeting is held. Adequate time should be allowed for testimony bearing. . . .

"A proper fast day observance consists of abstaining from food and drink for two consecutive meals, attending the fast and testimony meeting, and making a generous offering to the bishop for the care of those in need. A *minimum* fast offering is defined as the equivalent of the value of two meals." (*General Handbook of Instructions* [1968], p. 40.)

### History of fast day

Sunday, however, has not always been the day when fasting and

testimony bearing has been observed in the Church. President Joseph Fielding Smith has furnished us with a very interesting account of the development of this law and principle. He said:

"Fasting and prayer in the present dispensation have been carried over from primitive times. From the organization of the Church the principle of fasting in the spirit of prayer has been a commandment of the Lord. [See D&C 59:8-13; 88:76, 119.] In regard to the choosing of a set day of the month, we have this testimony coming from President Brigham Young in a discourse [which was delivered] in the old tabernacle, [in] Salt Lake City, [on] December 8, 1867.

"President Young said, '. . . You know that the first Thursday in each month we hold . . . fast day. How many here know the origin of this day? Before tithing was paid, the poor were supported by donations. They came to [the Prophet] Joseph . . . and wanted help, in Kirtland, and he said there should be a fast day, which was decided upon. It was to be held once a month, as it is now, and all that would have been eaten that day, of flour, or meat, or butter, or fruit, or anything else, was to be carried to the fast meeting and put in the hands of a person selected for the purpose of taking care of the poor. If we were to do this now faithfully, [said President Young] do you think the poor would lack for flour, or butter, or cheese, or meat, or sugar, or anything they needed to eat? No! there would be more than could be used by all the poor among us. . . .'"

President Smith then explained: "This custom of holding fast meetings on Thursday was continued in Nauvoo and also after the coming of

the members of the Church to the Rocky Mountains. I can remember the time when certain business houses closed their doors each fast day and placed on the doors, 'Closed for fast meeting'.

"The change from the first Thursday to the first Sunday of the month came about in this manner. Hyrum M. Smith, who later became a member of the Council of the Twelve, was a missionary in Newcastle, England, in the year 1896. On the Thursday of the fast meeting, members of the Church in that land had to get excused from their employment with a loss of pay. Some of them were workers in the coal mines. When these came from the pits, they had to go home, bathe, and change their clothes. This was a loss both of time and compensation. Hyrum wrote to his father, President Joseph F. Smith, and asked why, under such circumstances, the fast day had to be a Thursday and not a Sunday. President Smith took the letter to the meeting of the First Presidency and the apostles and presented it there. The following is an excerpt from the minutes of the meeting held November 5, 1896:

"President Joseph F. Smith introduced the subject of fast meetings, suggesting that a change of the time from the first Thursday to the first Sunday in each month would probably be beneficial. This was endorsed by President George Q. Cannon, and after other brethren had spoken on the subject, it was decided that the Tabernacle services would be dispensed with on the first Sunday of each month, and that the saints in this city as well as in the country wards, should have the privilege of meeting in their meeting houses at 2 o'clock P.M., to observe fast day." (*Improvement Era*, Dec. 1956, p. 895.)

In addition to there being a change in the day of holding fast meeting and observing the law of the fast, one other development should be noted. When the Prophet Joseph set up the program in Kirtland in the early days of the Church, the Saints were counseled to

bring to the fast meeting the items of food from which they had abstained. Subsequently this method has been modified so that currently the deacons of the Church call monthly on their assigned homes and the fast offering contribution is made in cash.

### Experience of Lorenzo Snow

Miracles are brought about through fasting and sincere prayer. In 1850 Lorenzo Snow, who later became president of the Church, labored in Italy as a missionary, trying to open that country to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was somewhat shy and self-conscious, but spiritually, he was a giant. One family who had befriended him had a critically ill child. In fact, Elder Snow realized that only through sincere fasting, mighty prayer, unswerving faith, and through the power of the priesthood could that three-year-old child be saved. He knew how much the healing of this boy would mean to the people in this small Italian village.

Climbing with his companion to a place of seclusion on the foothills of the Alps just above the village, in the spirit of fasting and prayer, he earnestly petitioned and pleaded with the Lord for six long, anxious hours for the privilege of using divine power to heal that little boy. Finally, the answer came; the reply was yes, he would be granted the privilege.

As a humble servant of the Lord, he walked down the mountainside with perfect faith that the dying child's life would be spared. The boy was then given a blessing and a promise that he would live. A few hours later when Elder Snow and his companion returned to the home, they found that the child was greatly improved and was well on the way to recovery. Elder Snow realized that his fasting and prayer had reached the throne of a benevolent Heavenly Father. He remarked to the grateful parents: "The God of heaven has done this for you." (See Eliza R.

Snow, *Biography of Lorenzo Snow*, pp. 128-29.)

### Benefits of fasting

Surely the law of the fast is an inspired program and its observance has many virtues. President David O. McKay summed them up in these words:

"The word *fast* is used to signify a self-imposed restraint with respect to the eating of food. Historians tell us that the custom of fasting dates back to the early history of the human race. . . .

"Whatever its origin, it is significant to note that several virtues are attached to the observance of the custom. . . . All the principles associated with fasting seem to point to the fact that it produces, first, physical well-being; [then, self-mastery; next, an opportunity to help others, and finally,] spiritual strength.

"But the greatest of all [the] benefits [from fasting is] the spiritual strength derived by the subjection of physical appetite to the will of the individual." (See David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals*, Improvement Era, 1953, pp. 208-213.)

An extremely important factor of the fast day observance is attending the fast and testimony meeting and acknowledging and expressing gratitude to our Heavenly Father for his many blessings.

### Increased blessings

It seems to me that there are four factors involved in a proper observance

of the fast day, namely: first, abstaining; then, praying; next, testifying; and finally, contributing.

I am confident that each of us has a continual need for additional blessings. A devoted servant of the Lord, a member of the First Presidency, has given us the formula, which, if followed, will increase our blessings. Again may I repeat his inspired promise: "If we will *double* our fast offerings we shall increase our prosperity, both spiritually and temporally."

I firmly believe that the paying of fast offerings does result in rich blessings. And to this I testify in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Without announcement, the Tabernacle Choir sang "Recessional", followed by the playing of an organ interlude.

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### President Spencer W. Kimball

We have just listened to Elder Henry D. Taylor, Assistant to the Council of the Twelve. He was followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "Recessional" and then a brief interlude.

We welcome those joining us on television and radio in this first session of the 144th Semi-Annual Conference of the Church.

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Council of the Twelve will be our concluding speaker.

## Elder L. Tom Perry

Of the Council of the Twelve

I have recently had the opportunity of returning to school, at least for a five-day period. I was invited to attend a data processing school. After the usual adjustments of trying to condition

myself again to a classroom situation, I was captivated by the latest marvels that mankind has developed. I was intrigued by an instructor who would key into a keyboard a few symbols and access a