

## Elder Thomas S. Monson

Today I desire to preach no sermon nor deliver a formal message. Rather, may I simply share with you my innermost thoughts. President David O. McKay referred to such as "heart petals." I open to your view a window to my soul.

### Concern for the widow

The Epistle of James has long been a favorite book of the Holy Bible. I find his brief message heartwarming and filled with life. Each of us can quote that well-known passage, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5.) How many of us, however, remember his definition of religion? "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27.)

The word *widow* appears to have had a most significant meaning to our Lord. He cautioned His disciples to beware the example of the scribes, who feigned righteousness by their long apparel and their lengthy prayers, but who devoured the houses of widows. (See Mark 12:38, 40.)

To the Nephites came the direct warning, "I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against . . . those that oppress the . . . widow." (3 Ne. 24:5.)

To the Prophet Joseph Smith He directed, "The storehouse shall be kept by the consecrations of the church; and widows and orphans shall be provided for, as also the poor." (D&C 83:6.)

Such teachings were not new then. They are not new now. Consistently the Master has taught, by example, His concern for the widow.

To the grieving widow at Nain, bereft of her only son, He came personally and to the dead son restored the breath of life—and to the astonished widow her son. To the widow at Zarephath, who with her son faced imminent starvation, He sent the prophet Elijah with the power to teach faith as well as provide food.

We may say to ourselves, "But that was long ago and ever so far away." I respond: "Is there a city called Zarephath near your home? Is there a town known as Nain?" We may know our cities as Columbus or Coalville, Detroit or Denver. Whatever the name, there lives within each city the widow deprived of her companion and often her child. The need is the same. The affliction is real.

The widow's home is generally not large or ornate. Frequently it is modest in size and humble in appearance. Often it is tucked away at the top of the stairs or the back of the hallway and consists of but one room. To such homes He sends you and me.

There may exist an actual need for food, clothing—even shelter. Such can be supplied. Almost always there remains the hope for that special hyacinth to feed the soul.

*Go visit the lonely, the dreary;  
Go comfort the weeping, the weary.  
Oh, scatter kind deeds on your way  
And make the world brighter today.*

### "Long Line of the Lonely"

The ranks of those in special need grow larger day by day. Note the obituary page of your newspaper. Here the drama of life unfolds to our view. Death comes to all mankind. It comes to the aged as they walk on faltering feet. Its summons are heard by those who have scarcely reached midway in life's journey, and it often

hushes the laughter of little children.

After the funeral flowers fade, the well wishes of friends become memories, the prayers offered and words spoken dim in the corridors of the mind. Those who grieve frequently join that vast throng I shall entitle "The Long Line of the Lonely." Missed is the laughter of children, the commotion of teenagers, and the tender, loving concern of a departed companion. The clock ticks more loudly, time passes more slowly, and four walls do indeed a prison make.

Hopefully, all of us may again hear the echo of words spoken by the Master: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these. . . , ye have done it unto me." (Matt. 25:40.)

As we resolve to minister more diligently to those in need, let us remember to include our children in these learning lessons of life.

I have many memories of my boyhood days. Anticipating Sunday dinner was one of them. Just as we children hovered at our so-called starvation level and sat anxiously at the table with the aroma of roast beef filling the room, mother would say to me, "Tommy, before we eat, take this plate I've prepared down the street to Old Bob and hurry back."

I could never understand why we couldn't first eat and later deliver his plate of food. I never questioned aloud but would run down to his house and then wait anxiously as Bob's aged feet brought him eventually to the door. Then I would hand him the plate of food. He would present to me the clean plate from the previous Sunday and offer me a dime as pay for my services. My answer was always the same: "I can't accept the money. My mother would tan my hide." He would then run his wrinkled hand through my blond hair and say, "My boy, you have a wonderful mother. Tell her thank you."

You know, I think I never did tell her. I sort of felt mother didn't need to be told. She seemed to sense his gratitude. I remember, too, that Sunday dinner always seemed to taste a bit better after I had returned from my errand.

Old Bob came into our lives in an interesting way. He was a widower in his eighties when the house in which he was living was to be demolished. I heard him tell my grandfather his plight as the three of us sat on the old front porch swing. With a plaintive voice, he said to grandfather, "Mr. Condie, I don't know what to do. I have no family. I have no place to go. I have no money." I wondered how grandfather would answer. Slowly grandfather reached into his pocket and took from it that old leather purse from which, in response to my hounding, he had produced many a penny or nickel for a special treat. This time he removed a key and handed it to Old Bob. Tenderly he said, "Bob, here is the key to that house I own next door. Take it. Move in your things. Stay as long as you like. There will be no rent to pay and nobody will ever put you out again."

Tears welled up in the eyes of Old Bob, coursed down his cheeks, then disappeared in his long, white beard. Grandfather's eyes were also moist. I spoke no word, but that day my grandfather stood ten feet tall. I was proud to bear his given name. Though I was but a boy, that lesson has influenced my life.

### Let's make a call or two

Each of us has his own way of remembering. At Christmas time I take delight in visiting the widows and widowers from the ward where I served as bishop. There were eighty-seven then—just nine today. On such visits, I never know what to expect; but this I do know: visits like these provide for me the Christmas spirit,

which is, in reality, the Spirit of Christ.

Come with me, and we'll together make a call or two. There's the nursing home on West Temple where four widows reside. You never walk up the pathway but what you notice the parted curtain, as one inside waits hour after hour for the approaching step of a friend. What a welcome! Good times are remembered, perhaps a gift given, a blessing provided; but then it is time to leave. Never could I depart without first responding to the request of a widow almost one hundred years of age. Though she was blind, she would say, "Bishop, you're to speak at my funeral and recite from memory Tennyson's poem, 'Crossing the Bar.' Let's hear you do it right now!" I would proceed:

*Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea, . . .*

*Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
When I embark;*

*For tho' from out our bourne of  
Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crost the bar.*

(In *Major British Writers*, ed. G. B. Harrison, enl. ed., New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959, 2:466.)

Tears came easily, and then, with a smile, she would say, "Tommy, that was pretty good, but see that you do it a wee bit better at the funeral!" I later honored her request.

At another nursing home on First South, we might interrupt, as I

did a few years ago, a professional football game. There, before the TV, were seated two widows. They were warmly and beautifully dressed, absorbed in the game. I asked, "Who's winning?" They responded, "We don't even know who's playing, but at least it's company." I sat between those two angels and explained the game of football. I enjoyed the best contest I can remember. I may have missed a meeting, but I harvested a memory.

Let's hurry along to Redwood Road. There is a much larger home here where many widows reside. Most are seated in the well-lighted living room. But in her bedroom, alone, is one on whom I must call. She hasn't spoken a word since a devastating stroke some years ago. But then, who knows what she hears?—so I speak of good times together. There isn't a flicker of recognition, not a word spoken. In fact, an attendant asks if I am aware that this patient hasn't uttered a word for years. It made no difference. Not only had I enjoyed my one-sided conversation with her—I had communed with God.

### "Reconsidered and approved"

When our beloved President Spencer W. Kimball met recently with those from a country where want is present, he asked not regarding statistics, but rather inquired: "Do our people have enough to eat? Are the widows cared for?" He was concerned.

During the administration of President George Albert Smith, there lived in our ward an impoverished widow who cared for her three mature daughters, each of whom was an invalid. They were large in size and almost totally helpless. To this dear woman fell the task to bathe, to feed, to dress, and to care for her girls. Means were limited. Outside help was nonexistent. Then came the blow

that the house she rented was to be sold. What was she to do? Where would she go? The bishop came to the Church Office Building to inquire if there were some way the house could be purchased. It was so small, the price so reasonable. The request was considered, then denied.

A heartsick bishop was leaving the front door of the building when he met President George Albert Smith. After the exchange of greetings, President Smith inquired, "What brings you to the headquarters building?" He listened carefully as the bishop explained, but said nothing. He then excused himself for a few minutes. He returned wearing a smile and directed, "Go upstairs to the fourth floor. A check is waiting there for you. Buy the house!"

"But the request was denied."

Again he smiled and said, "It has just been reconsidered and approved." The home was purchased. That dear widow lived there and cared for her daughters until each of them had passed away. Then she, too, went home to God and to her heavenly reward.

### **Mindful of the widowed and lonely**

The leadership of this Church is mindful of the widow, the widower, the lonely. Can we be less concerned? Emerson counseled that rings and jewels are not gifts, but sub-

stitutes for gifts. The only real gift is a portion of oneself. (See "Gifts," by Ralph Waldo Emerson.)

We remember that during the meridian of time a bright, particular star shone in the heavens. Wise men followed it and found the Christ child. Today wise men still look heavenward and again see a bright, particular star. It will guide you and me to our opportunities. The burden of the downtrodden will be lifted, the cry of the hungry stilled, the lonely heart comforted. And souls will be saved—yours, theirs, and mine.

If we truly listen, we may hear that voice from far away say to us, as it spoke to another, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." (Matt. 25:21.)

May we see that special star, may we hear that same salutation, is my humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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The Choir sang "Home's Bright Love" without announcement.

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### **President Kimball**

We have heard from Elder Thomas S. Monson, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "Home's Bright Love."

We shall now be pleased to hear from President N. Eldon Tanner, First Counselor in the First Presidency.

## **President N. Eldon Tanner**

I am so glad to be here with you today and to hear this wonderful music and these sermons that have been taught. I am so thankful to you people who have thought of me in your prayers that I would regain my health, and I am thankful that I am able to participate with you today.

### **Belief in God and his Son**

I have been thinking lately of the first and third articles of faith: "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost," and "We believe that through the Atonement