

President Thomas S. Monson

President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We welcome you this afternoon to the fifth and concluding session of the 167th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We note that Elders Dallin H. Oaks, W. Eugene Hansen, and Carlos H. Amado are seated on the stand in the Assembly Hall. Elders Hugh W. Pinnock, Lino Alvarez, and Dieter F. Uchtdorf, and Bishop Richard C. Edgley are in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building.

We also send our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating in these proceedings by radio, television, cable, or satellite transmission.

The Tabernacle Choir, directed by Craig Jessop and accompanied by John

Longhurst and Clay Christiansen, will provide the music for this session.

The choir will begin this service by singing "Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah." The invocation will then be offered by Elder Loren C. Dunn of the Seventy.

The choir sang "Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah."

Elder Loren C. Dunn offered the invocation.

President Monson

The choir will now sing "I Stand All Amazed at the Love Jesus Offers Me." Then Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will be our first speaker.

The choir sang "I Stand All Amazed."

Elder L. Tom Perry

Rededication of the early Saints

After arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, the Mormon pioneers found establishing settlements in the desert to be a real challenge. Daily they encountered trials and hardships that kept reminding them that their new life was very different from the one to which they had been accustomed. There were homes to build, land to develop, irrigation ditches to dig, gardens to plant, wood to chop, and cattle to herd. Also there were constant immigrations into Utah, drought, and the grasshopper plague, all making the economy of this new territory very uncertain. Because of the great effort required to provide for their families, some of the early pioneers drifted into spiritual lethargy. This was of grave concern to the early Church leaders. They

believed that some of their struggles were the direct result of the Saints' laxity in keeping the commandments.

In 1856 the First Presidency commenced a reform movement. Church leaders traveled throughout the territory crying repentance to the Saints. They sent the block teachers out with a list of questions to ask the families. Some of these questions were:

Have you betrayed your brethren or sisters in anything?

Have you committed adultery?

Have you taken the name of Deity in vain?

Have you been intoxicated with strong drink?

Have you paid your debts?

Do you teach your family the gospel of salvation?

Do you pray night and morning with your family?

Do you attend your ward meetings? (Adapted from "Questions to Be Asked the Latter-day Saints," in *Church History in the Fulness of Times* [Church Educational System manual, 1993], 366.)

The Saints were challenged by their leaders to rededicate themselves to serving the Lord and keeping His commandments, and they accepted their leaders' counsel and repented.

The Holy Ghost will direct us

In 1997 we have many of the same concerns, although our world is very different. All these questions would still be very appropriate if asked today. Moreover, the list could probably be expanded due to new sources of temptation that the early pioneers could not have anticipated. Increasingly, the balance between living in the world and not being of the world is becoming more delicate. Publications, radio, television, and the Internet have surrounded us with worldliness. Some of the television programming has caused such a negative public outcry that a rating system has been established so viewers can evaluate the content of the programs. Surely this is an admission that there is a great deal available to us that must be avoided. The question is whether or not we can trust others to make rating decisions for us. We are fortunate to have been blessed with a special power to direct us in making important decisions between right and wrong.

In that special, sacred hour when the Savior realized that His earthly ministry was about at an end, He gathered His Twelve together in what we call the Last Supper. He gave them hope that they would not be left alone after He had departed from them. He comforted them with these words:

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Upon receiving this blessed assurance, the other Judas, not Iscariot, asked, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" (John 14:22).

Jesus answered and said unto him:

"If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. . . .

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:23, 26).

After the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, the promised Comforter was given to those who would submit themselves to be baptized by water and be numbered among His Saints. On the day of Pentecost there was a great manifestation that was given to the Twelve, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost. Peter called on those assembled to repent and be baptized and then they would receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

A similar event occurred when the Savior appeared to the Nephites.

The power to bestow the Holy Ghost has been restored

Dark days followed the establishment of the Savior's Church as apostasy entered in among the membership of the Church. Priesthood authority was removed from the earth because of the unrighteousness of the people.

Light returned to the world through Joseph Smith when he received the First Vision in 1820. For a decade, the Prophet Joseph Smith was carefully pre-

pared to reestablish God's Church. He received priesthood authority—first the Aaronic Priesthood from John the Baptist, then the Melchizedek Priesthood from Peter, James, and John. Revelations were given to Joseph as God's voice was heard from the heavens. A communication link between God and His prophet was restored.

As a small congregation gathered on April 6 of 1830 to organize the Church, the Prophet Joseph Smith asked those present if they were willing to accept him and Oliver Cowdery as their teachers and special advisers. Those present raised their hands in support.

"Although they had previously received the Melchizedek Priesthood, [Joseph and Oliver] then ordained each other to the office of elder. They did this to signify that they were elders in the newly organized church. The sacrament of the Lord's supper was administered next. . . . Joseph and Oliver then confirmed those who had previously been baptized as members of the Church of Jesus Christ and bestowed upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost" (*Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 67–68).

What a tremendous privilege it is to be numbered among those who, by the power of the priesthood, have been baptized by water and then have had hands laid upon their heads and received the Holy Ghost.

Elder LeGrand Richards, describing the gift of the Holy Ghost, said:

"To me, the gift of the Holy Ghost is as important to man as sunshine and water are to the plants. You take them away, and the plants would die. You take the Holy Ghost out of this Church, and this Church would not be any different than any other church. And it is manifest in so many ways in the lives and the devotion of the members of the Church" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1979, 109; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 76).

Experience with heeding the Holy Spirit

Gifts have only limited value unless they are used. The Holy Ghost will be our constant companion if we submit ourselves to the will of our Father in Heaven, always remembering Him and keeping His commandments.

I remember a critical time in my life and how grateful I was when a still, small voice gave me direction to make an important decision. I had been with a retail firm for a number of years. We had enjoyed extraordinary success. We wanted to expand the business but needed a great deal of capital. In an attempt to raise the money, we contacted the best financial advisers we could find. They encouraged us to merge with a larger firm. The merger was successfully completed, and I was asked to sign a five-year contract to give continuity to management. Within a matter of months I found myself in a very difficult situation. The new owners wanted me to violate a trust that I felt I just could not do. After long discussions, they continued to insist and I continued to refuse. Seeing there was no way to break the deadlock, I agreed to leave the company. The timing for me was devastating. I had a wife who was seriously ill and required a lot of medical attention, a daughter away to college, and a son on a mission. I spent the next year just getting enough consulting work to pay my expenses.

After struggling for about one year, a company called me from California and invited me to come out and talk to them about working for them. I went out and negotiated a very good contract; I was delighted with the opportunity. I told them that I had to return home and discuss it with my family before I could give an answer. I returned home and after a careful discussion, I convinced my family that it was the right thing to do. In the process of calling the firm to accept the offer, a voice just as strong and powerful as I have ever heard came to me

and said, "Say no to the offer." I could not ignore the voice, so I turned the offer down, but I was distressed. I could not comprehend why I had been told to do such a thing. I went upstairs to my bedroom, sat on the bed, opened the scriptures, and they fell open to the Doctrine and Covenants, section 111. This was the only section given in the state of Massachusetts, where my home was at that particular time. These words literally jumped out of the page and met my eye:

"Concern not yourselves about your debts, . . . I will give you power to pay them. . . .

"Tarry in this place, and in the regions round about" (D&C 111:5, 7).

A great peace came to my soul. Within just a few days I was offered a fine position in Boston. A few months later I had the great privilege of hosting a conference in which President Harold B. Lee, then First Counselor in the First Presidency, was the featured speaker. The conference was a glorious success as we feasted on the words of President Lee. The following July, President Joseph Fielding Smith passed away and President Lee became the prophet. Three months later I was asked to come to Salt Lake, where I received a call to leave my profession and join the General Authorities.

I have often wondered what would have happened if I had not heeded the Holy Spirit in its counseling me not to leave Boston.

What the Holy Ghost can mean to us

Parley P. Pratt gave us a vision of what the gift of the Holy Ghost could mean to us when he said:

"The gift of the Holy Ghost . . . quickens all the intellectual faculties, increases, enlarges, expands and purifies all the natural passions and affections; and adapts them, by the gift of wisdom, to their lawful use. It inspires, develops,

cultivates and matures all the fine-toned sympathies, joys, tastes, kindred feelings and affections of our nature. It inspires virtue, kindness, goodness, tenderness, gentleness and charity. It develops beauty of person, form and features. It tends to health, vigor, animation and social feeling. It invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual man. It strengthens, and gives tone to the nerves. In short, it is, as it were, marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the ears, and life to the whole being" (*Key to the Science of Theology*, 9th ed. [1965], 101).

I bear witness of the power and comfort the gift of the Holy Ghost is to those who live worthy of it. What a reassurance it is for us to know that we are not left alone to find the course that we must follow to merit the eternal blessings of our Father in Heaven. We do not need man-made rating systems to determine what we should read, what we should watch, what we should listen to, or how we should conduct our lives. What we do need to do is live worthy of the continued companionship of the Holy Ghost and have the courage to follow the promptings that come into our lives. May the Lord bless us that we may ever be mindful of this great and precious gift, even the gift of the Holy Ghost, I humbly pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "How Great the Wisdom and the Love."

President Monson

Thank you, Elder Perry. We just heard from Elder Perry, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Note please, the presence of Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who spoke yesterday morning. We are just delighted to have him here. Our hearts go out today in