

President Gordon B. Hinckley

My dear brothers and sisters, my heart reaches out to you wherever you may be this Sabbath morning. I feel a kinship with all of you who are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I love this work and marvel at its strength and growth, for the manner in which it touches the lives of people throughout the world. I feel extremely humble in speaking to you. I have pleaded with the Lord to direct my thoughts and words.

An Uruguayan sister's conversion story

We have just returned from a long journey from Salt Lake City to Montevideo, Uruguay, to dedicate a temple, the 103rd working temple of the Church. It was a time of great rejoicing for our members there. Thousands gathered in that beautiful and sacred building and in surrounding chapels.

One of the speakers, a woman, told a story, the likes of which you have heard many times. As I remember it, she recounted a time in their lives when the missionaries knocked on their door. She had not the remotest idea of what they were teaching. However, she invited them in, and she and her husband listened to their message.

It was, for them, an unbelievable story. They told of a boy who lived in the state of New York. He was 14 years of age when he read in the book of James: "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).

Desiring wisdom, because various creeds each claimed to have the truth, young Joseph determined to go into the woods and pray to the Lord.

This he did, and he experienced a vision in response to his prayer. God the Eternal Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, the Resurrected Lord, appeared before

him and spoke with him. Other manifestations followed. Among these was securing from a hill near his home golden plates which he translated by the gift and power of God. Heavenly messengers appeared to him, bestowing upon him keys of the priesthood and the authority to speak in the name of God.

How could anyone believe such a story? It seemed preposterous. And yet these people believed as they were instructed. Faith came into their hearts to accept that which they had been taught. It was a miracle. It was a gift from God. They could not believe it, and yet they did.

Following their baptism, their knowledge of the Church grew. They learned more of temple marriage, of families united for eternity under the authority of the holy priesthood. They were determined to have this blessing. But there was no temple anywhere near them. They scrimped and saved. When they had enough, they traveled all the way from Uruguay to Utah with their children, here to be sealed together as a family in the bonds of eternal marriage. She is today an assistant to the matron in the new Montevideo Uruguay Temple. Her husband is a counselor in the temple presidency.

Faith motivates conversion

I am not surprised that comparatively few people join the Church from among the large number on whom the missionaries call. There's no faith. On the other hand, I am amazed that so many do. It is a marvelous and wonderful thing that thousands are touched by the miracle of the Holy Spirit, that they believe and accept and become members. They are baptized. Their lives are forever touched for good. Miracles occur. A seed of faith comes into their hearts. It enlarges as they

learn. And they accept principle upon principle until they have every one of the marvelous blessings that come to those who walk with faith in this, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

It is faith that is the converter. It is faith that is the teacher. Thus it has been from the beginning.

I marvel at the quality of the men and women who accepted Joseph Smith's testimony and came into the Church. They included such men as Brigham Young, the Pratt brothers, Willard Richards, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, the wives of these men, and a host of others. They were people of substance. Many of them were well educated. They were blessed of the Lord with the faith to accept the story which they heard. When they received the message, when the gift of faith touched their lives, they were baptized. The brethren gladly gave up what they had been doing and, with the support of their families, responded to calls to go across the sea to teach that which they had accepted on faith.

I read again the other day Parley P. Pratt's account of his reading the Book of Mormon and coming into the Church. Said he:

"I opened it with eagerness, and read its title page. I then read the testimony of several witnesses in relation to the manner of its being found and translated. After this I commenced its contents by course. I read all day; eating was a burden, I had no desire for food; sleep was a burden when the night came, for I preferred reading to sleep.

"As I read, the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I knew and comprehended that the book was true, as plainly and manifestly as a man comprehends and knows that he exists" (*Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* [1985], 20).

The gift of faith touched his life. He could not do enough to repay the Lord for what had come to him. He spent the remainder of his days in missionary ser-

vice. He died a martyr to this great work and kingdom.

New temples testify of pioneer faith

Beautiful new temples are now being constructed in Nauvoo, Illinois, and Winter Quarters, Nebraska. They will stand as testimonies to the faith and faithfulness of the thousands of Latter-day Saints who built and later forsook Nauvoo, to move with great suffering across what is now the state of Iowa to their temporary abode in Council Bluffs and in Winter Quarters, just north of Omaha.

The Winter Quarters Temple property adjoins the burial ground of many who gave their lives for this cause which they regarded as more precious than life itself. Their journey to the valley of the Great Salt Lake is an epic without parallel. The suffering they endured, the sacrifices they made became the cost of what they believed.

I have in my office a small statue of my own pioneer grandfather burying beside the trail his wife and her brother who died on the same day. He then picked up his infant child and carried her to this valley.

Faith? There can be no doubt about it. When doubts arose, when tragedies struck, the quiet voice of faith was heard in the stillness of the night as certain and reassuring as was the place of the polar star in the heavens above.

It was this mysterious and wonderful manifestation of faith that brought reassurance, that spoke with certainty, that came as a gift from God concerning this great latter-day work. Countless, literally countless, are the stories of its expression in the pioneer period of the Church. But it does not stop there.

Gift of faith motivates us still today

As it was then, so it is today. This precious and marvelous gift of faith, this gift from God our Eternal Father is still

the strength of this work and the quiet vibrancy of its message. Faith underlies it all. Faith is the substance of it all. Whether it be going into the mission field, living the Word of Wisdom, or paying one's tithing, it is all the same. It is the faith within us that is evidenced in all we do.

Our critics cannot understand it. Because they do not understand, they attack. A quiet inquiry, an anxious desire to grasp the principle behind the result could bring greater understanding and appreciation.

I was asked at a news conference on one occasion how we get men to leave their vocations, to leave home, and serve the Church. I responded that we simply ask them, and we know what their answer will be.

What a marvelous and wonderful thing it is, this powerful conviction that the Church is true. It is God's holy work. He overrules in the things of His kingdom and in the lives of His sons and daughters. This is the reason for the growth of the Church. The strength of this cause and kingdom is not found in its temporal assets, impressive as they may be. It is found in the hearts of its people. That is why it is successful. That is why it is strong and growing. That is why it is able to accomplish the wonderful things that it does. It all comes of the gift of faith, bestowed by the Almighty upon His children who doubt not and fear not, but go forward.

Faith motivates missionaries

I sat in a meeting in Aruba the other evening. I dare say that most of those who hear me do not know where Aruba is or that there is even such a place. It is an island off the coast of Venezuela. It is a protectorate of the Netherlands. It is an inconspicuous place in this vast world. There were about 180 in the meeting. On the front row were eight missionaries: six elders and two sisters. The congregation consisted of men and women, boys

and girls of various racial strains. A little English was spoken, much of Spanish, and some expressions of other languages.

As I looked into the faces of that congregation, I thought of the faith there represented. They love this Church. They appreciate all that it does. They stand and testify of the reality of God the Eternal Father and of His Resurrected Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. They testify of the Prophet Joseph Smith and of the Book of Mormon. They serve where they are called to serve. They are men and women of faith who have embraced the true and living gospel of the Master, and in their midst are these eight missionaries. I am sure that it is a lonely place for them. But they are doing what they have been asked to do because of their faith. The two young women are beautiful and happy. As I looked at them, I said to myself, "Eighteen months is a long time to be in this faraway place." But they do not complain. They speak of the great experience they are having and of the wonderful people they meet. Shining through all of their service is the reassuring faith that the work in which they are engaged is true and that the service they are giving is given unto God.

It is so with our missionaries wherever they might serve, whether it be here in Salt Lake City or in Mongolia. They go and serve with faith in their hearts. It is a phenomenon of great power that quietly whispers, "This cause is true, and to you there is an obligation to serve it regardless of the cost."

Again, people cannot understand it, these thousands of bright and able young men and women who forgo social life, leave school, and selflessly go wherever they are sent to teach the gospel. They go by the power of faith, and they teach by the power of faith, planting a seed of faith here and another there which grow and mature into converts of strength and capacity.

Faith is the basis of testimony. Faith underlies loyalty to the Church. Faith represents sacrifice, gladly given in moving forward the work of the Lord.

Father, help us to be faithful

The Lord has commanded us to take upon ourselves “the shield of faith where-with ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (D&C 27:17).

In the spirit of faith of which I have spoken, I testify that this is the work of the Lord, that this is His kingdom, re-

stored to the earth in our time to bless the sons and daughters of God of all generations.

O Father, help us to be faithful unto Thee and unto our glorious Redeemer, to serve Thee in truth, to make that service an expression of our love, is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “High on the Mountain Top.”

Elder Richard H. Winkel offered the benediction.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 171st Annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 2:00 P.M. on Sunday, April 1, 2001. This session was conducted by President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for this session. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Linda Margetts was the organist.

President Monson made the following remarks as the meeting began.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this afternoon to the fifth and concluding session of the 171st Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

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

The music for this session will be provided by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Linda Margetts at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing “Arise, O God, and Shine.” Following the singing, the invocation will be offered by Elder Adhemar Damiani of the Seventy.

The choir sang “Arise, O God, and Shine.”

Elder Adhemar Damiani offered the invocation.

President Monson

Thank you, Brother Damiani.

The choir will now sing “The Lord Is My Shepherd.” Following the singing, it will be our pleasure to hear from Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir sang “The Lord Is My Shepherd.”
