

Degree of Labour - Mark Degree

When a Mason is advanced to the Mark Master Mason's Degree, he is introduced to an experience entirely different to those he encountered in the three Craft degrees. Those degrees dealt primarily with moral instruction, admonishing us to lead our lives in certain ways, guided by eternal ways. In the first degree there is transition from darkness to light with the attendant lessons. In the FC degree, the progress is from ignorance to knowledge, in the MM degree, from death to life. These are important and necessary lessons, for the knowledge and conditions of life and of ourselves, our potentials and limitations. It sets the pattern for our future guidance.

In the Mark Master Mason degree, we have a transition, similar to that of passing from school to the working world. We are brought face to face with the practical side of life, and we have to deal with the practical lesson of daily living. Instead of being taught mainly by lecture and precept, we are now participating in dramas that convey the lessons in a more vivid and personal manner. The first lesson taught is that of work and diligence, and throughout the degree we have several lessons that relate in some way to labour.

For instance, after his presentation and obligation, the candidate is sent to the quarries as a workman to prepare material for the Temple that is being built. He is sent to the quarries, not to learn by seeing or being told, but by the practical experience of doing the work himself. And so we are taught by enacting the part that "labour is the lot of man" and that without labour nothing can be built.

He then enters carrying work to be presented to the Overseers for inspection and acceptance. It was found that it was not of his own work and was not made according to the plans given him. It was rejected, thus teaching the lesson that it is our own labour that counts. That we cannot substitute the work of others and expect it to be used as material for our building. The craftsman then attempts to obtain wages to which he is not entitled. The work he presents was not a product of his own labour, was not accepted, and therefore no wages were due him. His imposture was discovered and he was punished by a severe reprimand. Nor in life should we expect to be paid for the work of other hands. Only by our own labours are we entitled to reward.

The craftsman is then returned to the quarries where, profiting by his mistakes, he resumes labour, and when found worthy, will receive his wages that are his due. Diligence in his labours will finally be rewarded. And so it is in outside life, we must profit by our mistakes. We must persevere in our labours, be diligent in well doing, work unceasingly at our allotted task, and then and only then can we expect to receive our wages.

And finally, when the craftsman is presented with the tools of the degree, he finds that they are not the instruments of measuring or planning, but the tools of labour. The tools to cut and carve, the tools with which to place on the product of his labours the mark of the honest workman who wrought with diligence and care.

The Mark degree seems especially suited to the intensely practical age in which we live. Its immediate teaching is not of the past or the future, but of the strenuous work-a-day present. The first and most impressive lessons is that of diligence, diligence in the pursuit of our calling whatever it may be. Above all, while it teaches the dignity and necessity of labour, it also teaches diligence in the building of character, which is one of the great purposes of Masonic life.

Ex. Comp. Adam Meldrum
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