

A Few Good Men

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We have all seen the multitude of stickers on automobile bumper but, there is one that is short, to the point, and it reveals much about the driver. It reads “The Marines Need A Few Good Men!”

Yes indeed – the Marines need a few good men. These words ring with the pride and esprit de corps and they emphasize the pride, fellowship and common loyalty shared by members of the Marine Corps and their families; it inspires enthusiasm and devotion. The Marines, man for man, are a fine fighting force that bows to no enemy at any time or any place. How many are a few in the Marine view? More importantly, what does the Marine Corps consider to be a good man? Even more fundamental, perhaps is the question: what is a good man? Do we know?

Such questions eventually caused me to think about their application to life generally and to the Templar Craft specifically. Our Commanderies needs a few good men too, and our future depends pretty much on: (a) how fast we get them; (b) how effectively we train them; and (c) how well we utilize them once they are ready for employment as full-fledged members of our Commanderies.

I should like to spend a few minutes on this concept of a few good men. It is a pertinent subject for our consideration when there are so few in our ranks who are willing to shoulder the burdens of service and sacrifice in the search for a meaningful brotherhood among Sir Knights. With a few good men we have accomplished much in the past and with a few good men, we continue to move forward today; with a few more good men we can achieve all our cherished goals.

First let me say something about the word "few." Frankly, there are those among us who do not appreciate the potential of one or two gathered together as they worship at World's altar; they think of mass, they measure success in numerical terms. They completely overlook the power of the individual or of the small group. I would remind those who think thusly that it only takes one or two, with an idea and with wholesome ideals to move the world:

- Moses did it when he led the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage.
- David did it when he met and slew Goliath in the Valley of Elah.
- Gideon did it when he, in the company of a relative handful of men, fought and defeated the Midianites.

- Christ did it too, and in the process, he established a new and great religion, aided in the beginning by only 12 disciples.
- George Washington provided a spark that lighted the flame of freedom and liberty in America. And,
- Winston Churchill kept it aglow in the continental darkness of war-torn Europe.

A Greek philosopher, Diogenes of Sinope, founded the Cynic school that advocated self-control and the pursuit of virtue through simple living. He is said to have once wandered through the streets of Athens with a lantern in daylight, searching for an honest man. Diogenes with his lamp became the symbol of man's search for human goodness, and he appeals to us today, perhaps by his insinuation that a good man is hard to find. Emma Barrett, a pioneer who helped remove barriers for female musicians in the male-dominated field and became an ambassador for New Orleans music says the same thing in her "*A Good Man Is Hard To Find*" song—she may be right.

This nation has been known for its trust in human goodness and for the hope that it would always win out in the struggle with evil. In those days there was a conviction that America could build a society on the basic goodness of the human heart. However, a wave of skepticism has inundated the land. Just how much goodness is there in the Country? Has education and our greater knowledge of the universe made us better?

These questions add up to a cynical agreement with Diogenes that a good man is hard to find. Today's restlessness and internal strife comes from this half-smothered yearning for a new kind of goodness. The old are shocked by what looks like a disregard for the standard simple virtues among the young. The young are equally shocked by what they see as a merely bogus goodness in the old. We know that despite all the evil in the world, there is still virtue in goodness, and we are convinced that most men everywhere still seek goodness in most of what they do.

The basic issue, it seems to me, is how does one recognize a good man when he sees one? The search for a good man is also complicated by our own personal values. We would rather be popular than pure, and that is the way life is. Our conception of the "good man" is probably based on our puritanical past as much as anything, and among many of us there is a popular misconception that the Bible, being our rule and guide, offers a blueprint of virtues that will permit the categorization of people into good and bad groups.

Beginning with Cain and Abel, we meet a succession of men who seem to be thought of as good or bad. Abel was good--Cain was bad; Abraham was good--Lot was bad; Joseph good--his brothers were bad. The list of the Biblical rulers leaves the impression that there were many good

kings and many bad kings. In the New Testament we are apt to think that the Disciples are good and the Pharisees are bad; of the early Christians as good and the Romans as bad.

When we really study this Great Light of ours and reflect on what we read, we will soon realize that life is not simple. The world that the Bible describes is our world, with real people, and like all real people, they are a curious mixture of good and bad. King David, for example, was written up as a model of devotion and integrity "after God's own heart." Yet we find him guilty of the most abominable murders. Not one of the great prophets was anything but human, and they all had their strengths and weaknesses. And everyone knows that the Disciples have been depicted in the Bible as being capable of stupidity, fear, cowardice, ambition, and jealousy.

So, where are we to find "Good men?" For the Marines the task is a rather simple one – they are never going to find a "good man" on the street. Civilians are not made to the rigid patterns that they employ. This being the case, they approach the problem sensibly. They recruit young men with potential, men that are healthy, strong, alert, intelligent, trustworthy, dedicated, and obedient and they proceed to shape them into the kind of men we associate with the Marine Corps. When the process is concluded they have their "good man," one that is representative of the best that the system can produce.

Should we who also seek good men in the Craft do less? Why not recognize at the outset that all men have their strengths and weaknesses? Why not recognize that all men, as they come to masonry, are imperfect? Why not recognize that the Commandery, just as the Marine Corps, has an obligation to shape and reform previous habits, attitudes, and opinions? Just like the Corps, we too can shape our candidates, and if we will do, everybody, especially our Commanderies, will benefit.

So, where are we to find "Good men?" Like the Marine Corps that task is simple – they are in our Symbolic Lodges and Royal Arch Chapters. We need to take the Brethren and Companions with their imperfections and shape and reform their previous habits, attitudes, and opinions. I do not want to leave you with a question without a solution. The following actions have been tried and proven to be effective:

- Templary is Christian to the core and the Orders of Knighthood require that we live up to the high calling of Christ in our lives; that we stand our stand as Christian warriors in the fierce struggle against evil in everyday life; and we support the Christian Church with all the zeal we possess.
- Make conclaves fun and educational. Most Sir Knights are not comfortable with the sword—practice until it is extension of their arm. Have a Templar program for every

conclave. Appoint Sir Knights to meaningful committees and allow them the flexibility to be successful.

- Improve Templar Communications. Use every form of communications at your disposal: mail, newsletter, Trestleboard, bulletin board, e-mail, website, telephone trees, face-to-face, etc. We all do not have the same communication capabilities so the more forms of communications that are used, the more opportunity for success.
- Be visible in the Symbolic Lodges and Royal Arch Chapters, especially the lodges. Be proficient in the Ancient Landmarks, jurisprudence, philosophies, symbolism, ritual, history, etiquettes, organizations, and structures; get a liberal education; and increase our knowledge and understanding in Freemasonry. Be an Ambassador from your Commandery. Be a coach to a newly raised Master Mason or be a mentor to a Master Mason or Companion and help him shape his symbolic stone for that Spiritual Temple.
- Remember: *Solicitation is not only allowed, it is encouraged!*

In conclusion, yes – a good man is hard to find, and he is hard to keep. He is elusive; he is always just a step out of range, just around the corner, or across the street. But he can be caught, and the best way to catch him is to be the best kind of man you can be. Live a good life yourself, abide by the lessons learned in the York Rite, and keep the Mosaic Law. If you will do these things, remembering always that we are all equal in the sight of God, you will find the good men, or at least those who are potentially good. Moreover, you will find them in abundance -- at the West Gate, seeking Light in Chivalric Freemasonry and a Commandery of Knights Templar that has produced a few good men, men like you and me.

Sir Knight Warder, answer the alarm. A good man waits without. What will we do with him?