



Grand Commanders Challenge Coin Explanation 2023 - 2024

My challenge coin for this Chivalric year is a very familiar symbol in Templar masonry, **the Cross and Crown, the Rusty Nails, and the Scarlet Robe**. This image is to remind us of the sacrifice and burden our Lord Jesus Christ endured on that crucifixion day, at a place called Calvary, on a hill called Golgotha; a Place of a Skull.

My hope is that as you carry this coin with you, may you be constantly reminded of your actions, your words spoken, the example of being a mason and Christian Knight. How will others see you? What will you see when you look in the mirror? Remember, others may not remember what you said, but they will certainly remember how you made them feel. The character of being righteous; purity of heart and rectitude of conduct; the being and doing right; conformity in character and conduct to a right standard. A coming into spiritual oneness with our Lord God, because for Christ's sake the believer in Christ is treated as righteous.

The Cross - Although Jesus is usually pictured carrying the whole cross, this may not have been the case. The practice in the day was to have a permanent stake on the ground with the victim to be crucified having to carry the crossbar on his back to the stake. Did they make an exception for Jesus and force Him to carry the whole cross?

In John 19:17, John says Jesus carried the cross while in Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21 and Luke 23:26 we are informed that Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus to carry the cross. There are no exact figures on the weight of the cross. It is believed to have been made of solid wood, so the whole cross is estimated to be over 300 pounds (136 kilograms) while the crossbar is estimated to be around 70 -90 pounds (32-41 kilograms).

Weakened by the torture, scourging, humiliation, and beatings, carrying even a crossbar would have been too much for the man Jesus. That is why the Roman soldiers had to force Simon to help Jesus bear the burden. But there was one burden Simon could not help Jesus with – the burden of the sin of all mankind: past, present, and future.

Only Jesus could be the propitiation of sin from us because He is God in the flesh (John 1:1, Colossians 2:9). If He had not done this, we would be separated from God forever (Romans 6:23). Our God is holy and righteous, but we are not because we have broken His perfect laws. We deserve to be punished. But because God is also love, He wants us to be reconciled with Him. The only way out was for Jesus, who is perfect in every way, to become a perfect sacrifice and take upon Himself the sin of mankind. He took the punishment we deserve and thus satisfied the requirement of the law that sin be punished (2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 2:24).

For the sinless Jesus, much worse than the physical weight of the cross was the weight of the sin of mankind. Praise God that with Jesus' death and resurrection we are not weighed down by our sin anymore.

The Crown – Not just any Crown, not a beautiful gold, shiny Crown adorned with precious stones, not a Crown that fit comfortably on his head, not a Crown meant for a King, it was a Crown of Thorns from the Acacia Tree.

Tucked away in the story of Jesus' bloody trail to the cross is that the soldiers who beat him wrapped him in a purple robe and placed a crown of thorns upon his head. They gave Jesus a crown of thorns to mock him because Jesus spoke openly to Pilate that he was a king, but his kingdom was not of this world (see John 18:36). The soldiers meant to mock Jesus by placing a crown of thorns on his head, but perhaps there is more to the significance of the crown of thorns.

There was nothing standard or routine about Jesus' arrest and being sentenced to die by crucifixion. He was an innocent man whom Pilate found no charge against (see John 19:6). But Jesus was sentenced to death because that was the reason he came to earth; so that he could save the world and make salvation possible for all peoples and nations.

Placing the crown of thorns on Jesus' head would not have been a normal part of crucifixion during this time. Crucifixion was used by the Romans as a punishment. In the documentation of Jesus' crucifixion, found within the Gospels, a crown of thorns was placed on his head by the soldiers.

Jesus told Pilot that his kingdom was not of this world. The soldiers draped a purple robe around Jesus, put a crown of thorns on his head and shouted, "Hail, King of the Jews" (see John 19:2-3). They did this to make a mockery of Jesus and belittle him. The crown of thorns symbolized the royalty and majesty of a king and was used as part of their futile attempts to humiliate him. They did not realize that Jesus was offering up his own life in accordance with the will of his Father to save the world.

The Three Rusty Nails – Jesus would have been made to lie with his back on the ground and his arms stretched out so that the soldiers could nail through his lower forearm or wrist into the wooden crossbeam.

In the case of Jesus, they may even have damaged the Ulnar artery running down his forearm, causing severe loss of blood: this would explain why Jesus died relatively quickly.

After this, the crossbeam was hauled up, with Jesus attached, and fixed to the upright beam of wood. Then a nail was pounded through his foot or ankle, anchoring it to the upright wood behind. Finally, the inscription detailing his crime was placed above his head that read, **"INRI," Hail, King of the Jews.**

For hours, and sometimes days, a condemned man was trapped in this position, naked and struggling to breathe. His position made his lungs constrict, but if he pushed himself up to make breathing easier the pain in his hands and feet was unimaginable. He eventually died through a combination of heart failure, suffocation and brain damage caused by lack of oxygen.

A Scarlet Robe - Just prior to the Lord Jesus Christ being crucified, we read these words – "... the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him and put on him a scarlet robe.

And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.” (Matthew 27:27-31)

Scarlet is a reference to our sins – “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: **though your sins be as scarlet**, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” (Isaiah 1:18)

A scarlet robe was placed on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a picture of him taking upon himself our sins – “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree,” (1 Peter 2:24).

He allowed himself to be mocked. He wore that scarlet robe as our substitute so we could be clothed in the robe of righteousness. – “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with **the robe of righteousness**, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorned herself with her jewels.” (Isaiah 61:10)

We remember the prodigal son when he returned after spending all his inheritance with “riotous living” – “And the son said unto him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” But the father said to his servants, “Bring forth **the best robe**, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.” (Luke 15:21-24)

So, we thank God for sending His Son to die on the cross for our sins, that we may be redeemed and be given eternal life. We thank the Lord Himself for his humility – the spitting, the mocking, the buffeting, being struck with the palms of their hands, the scourging ... allowing the very people he created to nail him to the cross, to crucify him. And then, while hanging on that cross, God poured out his wrath against sin during those three dark hours upon His beloved Son. He did all this, and more, for you and me.

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.” (Revelation 7:9-12)

White speaks of purity. The Lord Jesus took on that “scarlet robe” so we could wear the “best robe” a “white robe,” a “robe of righteousness.”

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” (Revelation 5:12-13)

INRI – Pontius Pilate was a Roman governor under the emperor of Tiberius in the 1st century. He is best known as the judge of Jesus' trial. He is believed to have hailed from the Samnium region of central Italy. Pontius Pilate served as the prefect, or a senior official authorized to enforce discipline, of Judaea from 26 to 36 A.D. He convicted Jesus of treason and declared that Jesus thought himself King of the Jews, and had Jesus crucified. Pilate died 39 A.D. The cause of his death remains a mystery. An artifact found in 1961 confirmed his existence.

As a Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate was granted the power of a supreme judge, which meant that he had the sole authority to order a criminal's execution. His duties as a prefect included such mundane tasks as tax collection and managing construction projects. But, perhaps his most crucial responsibility was that of maintaining law and order. Pontius Pilate attempted to do so by any means necessary. What he couldn't negotiate he is said to have accomplished through brute force.

Since according to the rules of the Roman Empire, calling oneself king was grounds for treason, Pontius Pilate ordered that the initials INRI be inscribed on Jesus' tomb after the crucifixion. In Latin, INRI stood for Jesus' name and his title of King of the Jews. Some believe the title was meant derisively to mock Jesus for his lofty claim.

The four letters, INRI, are a *titulus*, Latin for label, inscribed above Jesus Christ on the Crucifix. They are the Latin initials for the phrase Pontius Pilate had written when he ordered Him to be crucified, as described in John 19:19-23. These words were “**Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum**” translating to English as “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Latin uses “I” instead of the English “J”, and “V” instead of “U.”

Matthew 27:24 describes Pontius Pilate as refusing involvement in Jesus' crucifixion: *So, when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."* (ESV)

The circumstances surrounding Pontius Pilate's death in circa 39 A.D. are something of a mystery and a source of contention. According to some traditions, the Roman emperor Caligula ordered Pontius Pilate to death by execution or suicide. By other accounts, Pontius Pilate was sent into exile and committed suicide of his own accord.

The Hourglass in Freemasonry represents time. Time and death are the two most important symbols for a mason. One is that we all are moving forward in time and are unable to reverse the sands in the glass. The sand continues to migrate from the top of the glass to the bottom of the glass, regardless of our station on life and regardless of our wealth or worldly possessions. In this manner, we all are equal. Where do you see yourself today? Have you learned anything from the past? How do you want to move forward? What is important to you? How do others see you?

Death is another allusion in the hourglass. The hourglass is sometimes depicted with a scythe, emphasizing the theme of death. The scythe has a long history of depicting the Angle of Death. It is also linked to the legendary figure of Father Time. Death is the great leveler. Death will come for all of us in the end, regardless of our position in life or the title we have in masonry.

As masons and Christian Sir Knights, it is important that we daily conduct ourselves according to our religious beliefs and our masonic obligations. It really isn't that hard to be a good person. Treat others as you want to be treated. Search your soul for what is right and speak to God often, not just when you need him to help you. Repent daily for the wrongs you have done and avoid doing the things that you know to be wrong.

Sometimes I look at people and wonder why they act the way they do, never a kind word to speak, they do not appear to do anything to clean up their act. They act as though they are right and the whole world around them is wrong. Tomorrow is not promised to any of us, our judgement day will come. When that moment is knocking at your door, and you pass to that infinite light, the golden dawn, what will happen eternally? The Book of Life will be opened. Your name needs to be found in it to go to heaven and dwell with God forever. There is no reincarnation where you get to come back and try to do better. It is game over! This is your sentence.

My hope and prayer are that you will spend your eternity with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I leave you with this, "every human being has a claim upon your kind offices, do good unto all, recommended more especially to the household of the faithful. Be ye all of one mind, live in peace, and may the God of peace and love delight to dwell with and bless you."