

Templar Ritualist Course  
Order of the Temple Essay; Symbolisms of the Skull

In Freemasonry symbols are very important and none more so than the human skull. Symbols are like traffic signs on our fraternal highway and the skull is similar to a large flashing amber or caution light.

In life we must proceed with caution and when we behold the human skull, death or mortality probably first comes to mind. A symbol of the stark reality, that our time upon this earth is limited. *Tempus fugit*, time flies as we say in English. That should lead us to contemplate the remaining years of our lives and lead us to an attitude of humility. For everything that is so important now will someday cease to be. Thus, we wonder, are there things for which we should repent? If so, now is the time for there will be no opportunity for penitence when our “frail bodies become as the relic you hold in your hand” as has been taught us in the Order of the Temple. Very sobering.

Following this sense of foreboding, gloom and regret, it should bring eternity or everlasting life to mind. That we should spend our time improving ourselves by imitating the virtues of Jesus Christ. Through faith, works and God’s grace we hope to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. There to reside for eternity. Then let us vigorously pursue that path.

We refer to the skull and crossbones as relics. Remnants left after decay and disintegration, but they are not pieces of refuse to be discarded. Most prominent among them is the skull, which serves an important purpose, even as we hold it. It keeps us

humbly attentive to the future, all the while endeavoring to make ourselves fit for acceptance in Christ's eyes.

In secular use we find the skull marking dangerous or hazardous places and things; poison and so forth. Here again though, it brings us back to thoughts of mortality: *momento mori*, remember death as the old Latin phrase is interpreted.

When examining the skull in detail we see the eye sockets which held the sensors of sight, so important to a happy life. We imagine the beauty they beheld and ugliness as well. All the images seen in ones life. Even sad and possible horrible ones too. All the recorded imagery came through those openings, but now it is all gone. Hence, a striking image of physical death. The same is true for the ears and sounds heard. Love, hate, praise, censor and everything in between. Four of the five senses of human nature, to wit: seeing, hearing, smelling and tasting were totally encapsulated in that relic. Even the remaining sense of feeling was there too, as a part of the total feeling body. Over and over, the more we look the more is emphasized death or mortality. No matter how important the matters of life they will soon be gone. Thus, nothing is more important than preparing for the world to come. Dense indeed or perhaps blind, would be a man who can not realize his situation upon seeing or feeling the skull.

So much for the external features central to human existence. We know the skull is empty and the brain is gone as well, even if the cranial cavity is unexposed. That is the absolute and final sign of physical death. A blind man may live, so too the deaf and so forth, but without a brain our earthly life is over. Knowing all this, a prudent and God

fearing man should stop worrying about trivial matters in this life and tread the straight and narrow path to eternal life and salvation.

As much as anything the skull symbolizes choice and opportunity. It reminds us that we are hastening toward our physical graves, but that we need not “go down to the earth as beasts of the field,” as we were taught as Fellowcrafts. We are thinking beings, created in God’s image. Therefore, we have a choice to make regarding our souls. If we get right with God, so to speak we have a chance to live forever. That so in a way opportunity is calling us from the vacuous cavern of that relic.

Furthermore, it is symbolic of God’s love for us, at least I think so. That may seem strange, because he will someday strike us dead and that doesn’t seem lovable. That notwithstanding, we should think of the eternal lifeline He extends to us, His children. Only, humanity has a chance to enter the kingdom of Heaven. God must love all He has created. Otherwise he would destroy it. Hence, I think He loves the birds, bees, trees and in fact all living things, but when they die it is final. They have no hope of immortality.

It is also a symbol of hope. As I wrote in the last paragraph, animals have it not, but we have the hope of life everlasting, by the grace of God. Of all the living creatures He created in this world, we alone have hope. Therefore, the longer we look at the human skull the more it teaches or brings to mind. One might say that God speaks to us through the skull. It is not merely a piece of bone that belongs in a crypt. It is a teaching aid and we learned that as candidates when we held it in our left hand.

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We should think about how different it is than the heathen idol in *Psalms 115*. Both are lifeless and mute, but the skull is a symbol of what God, not man, has created. A relic of hope for the righteous. Then let us go forth exhibiting good work and glorifying our Father in Heaven, that said hope might come to fruition.

We must consider it a symbol of penance as well. At least half a symbol since we spent our Year of Penance with it in one hand and a lighted taper in the other. Finally, it symbolizes a remembrance of our mortality and faith in the immortality of the soul, as we expressed by partaking of the Fifth Libation. That symbology included a willingness for Judgement to condemn us if we ever knowingly or willfully violated our vows.

In short, the human skull symbolizes a Knight Templar through and through to those with a discerning eye.

Courteously,  
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