

Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Florida



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GRAND GENERALISSIMO'S MESSAGE

What is Chivalry?

Sir Knights: In the York Rite, the Knights Templar is known as Chivalric Masonry. The word *chivalry* has been handed down to us through the medieval institution of knighthood. Most people associate the word with ideals of knightly virtues, honor and courteous ("chivalrous") behavior, especially that of men towards women. The term originates in 10th century France. It is based on the French words for "knight" *chevalier*, and "horse" *cheval*. Medieval knights were skilled at the art of war, trained in fighting in armor, with horses, lances, swords, and shields. Knights were taught to excel in the arms, to show courage, to be gallant, loyal and to swear off cowardice, immorality, and wickedness. In literary texts of the era, such as *The Song of Roland* (the oldest major work of French literature, dating to the mid-12th century), chivalry referred to a worthy action on the battlefield.

Medieval writers often used the word chivalry, but its definition was never consistent until the 12th century when the term came to be understood as a moral, religious, and social code of knightly conduct. The particulars of the code varied, but codes would emphasize the virtues of courage, honor, and service.

Christianity had an influence on the virtues of chivalry. The Peace and Truce of God in the 10th century (an early attempt by the Catholic Church to control civil society in medieval Europe through non-violent means) was an example of this—it instructed knights to protect and honor the weaker members of society and also help the church maintain peace. The idea of the *Miles Christi* "knight of Christ" began to gain popularity in France, Spain, and Italy during the 11th century. The idea of "religious chivalry" was further developed during the time era of the Crusades.

During the later part of the Middle Ages, wealthy merchants also began to adopt chivalric attitudes. This democratization of chivalry led to the creation of courtesy books, which were guides to the behavior of "gentlemen." Thus, the idea of gentlemanly behavior—giving value to a man's honor, respect for women, and a concern for those less fortunate, can be traced to earlier ideals of knightly chivalry.

The following is a Code of Chivalry based on the unwritten "Old Code" and adapted from an article by Brian R. Price in 1997:

Prowess: To seek excellence in all endeavors expected of a knight, martial and otherwise, seeking strength to be used in the service of justice, rather than in personal aggrandizement.

Justice: Seek always the path of 'right', unencumbered by bias or personal interest. Recognize that the sword of justice can be a terrible thing, so it must be tempered by humanity and mercy.

Loyalty: Be known for unwavering commitment to the people and ideals you choose to live by. There are many places where compromise is expected; loyalty is not amongst them.

Defense: The ideal knight was sworn by oath to defend his liege lord and those who depended upon him. Seek always to defend your nation, your family, and those to whom you believe worthy of loyalty.

Courage: Being a knight often means choosing the more difficult path. Be prepared to make personal sacrifices in service of the precepts and people you value. At the same time, a knight should seek wisdom. Courage also means taking the side of truth in all matters, rather than seeking the easy lie. Seek the truth whenever possible, but remember to temper justice with mercy.

Faith: A knight must have faith in his beliefs, for faith roots him and gives hope against the despair that human failings create.

Humility: Value first the contributions of others; do not boast of your own accomplishments, let others do this for you.

Generosity: Be generous in so far as your resources allow.

Nobility: Seek great stature of character by holding to the virtues and duties of a knight, realizing that though the ideals cannot be reached, the quality of striving towards them ennobles the spirit, growing the character from dust towards the heavens. Nobility also has the tendency to influence others, offering a compelling example of what can be done in the service of rightness.

Do what is right because it is right. Seek to infuse every aspect of your life with these qualities. Should you succeed in even a tiny measure then you will be well remembered for your quality and virtue.

In 1822, Kenelm Henry Digby wrote a book entitled *The Broad Stone of Honour* in order to revive chivalry in modern life. He defined it thus: "Chivalry is only a name for that general spirit or state of mind which disposes men to heroic actions, and keeps them conversant with all that is beautiful and sublime in the intellectual and moral world."

The values embraced by Chivalry are timeless and priceless. As Christian Knights, we should always hold these precepts close to our hearts and strive ever to embody them in our daily lives.

Courteously and Fraternally,

Charles C. Cicero
Eminent Grand Generalissimo

Grand Encampment has a new web site located at:

www.knightstemplar.org.

The next time you are online, check out the site and let us know you visited us by signing our guest book.