

WHAT IS USEFUL KNOWLEDGE

A Lodge Address



Worshipful Master, and my Brothers,

The very first sentence of our Opening Charge sets before us both a purpose and a challenge. *“As useful knowledge is the great object of our desire, we ought to apply ourselves with zeal to the practice and profession of Freemasonry.”*

We hear those words at every meeting. But tonight let us pause and ask the question the Charge assumes we have already answered: *What is useful knowledge?*

Not knowledge in the abstract. Not the accumulation of facts, dates, or terminology. And not simply practical knowledge — knowing how to change your oil, sharpen a knife, or wire a switch. Those skills have their place, but they are not what the Charge is pointing to. The Charge is specific — it says *useful* knowledge. Knowledge that does something to the man himself. Knowledge that changes the man who holds it.

That distinction matters. A man can know a great deal and remain exactly who he was. He can recite ritual from memory, trace the history of the Craft, name every Grand Master in his jurisdiction — and still be governed by his passions, still wound the people around him, still sleepwalk through the most important decisions of his life.

Freemasonry is not interested in that kind of knowledge. We are a speculative art. The knowledge we pursue has a purpose: the improvement of the man and, through the man, the improvement of the world around him. So what does useful knowledge look like in practice? Over the past two months, two presentations

offered in this lodge give us excellent examples — and I want to draw a thread between them before I tell you where we are going next.

GNOTHI SEAUTON

Last month, we were asked to follow a different kind of map — back to the slopes of Mount Parnassus, to the Temple of Apollo, and to the two words carved above its entrance: *Gnothi Seauton*. Know Thyself. That address reminded us that self-knowledge is not one virtue among many. It is the groundwork on which all the others rest. You cannot govern a passion you have not yet identified. You cannot exercise charity without having first examined your own wounds. The Opening Charge tells us wisdom sits enthroned in the secret shade and the lonely cell. That is useful knowledge — the kind won in silence, through honest self-examination, applied daily with discipline and intention.

IRELAND, 1922

Two months ago, we were taken to Ireland in 1922. When armed men occupied Freemasons' Hall in Dublin, and lodges across the country were seized, vandalized, and shuttered, the brethren faced a moment of real consequence. What they demonstrated was not scholarship. It was something rarer: the practical application of everything Masonry teaches. Restraint under provocation. Prudence in measuring consequences. The moral courage to protect the Craft's future by governing the passions of the present. That is also useful knowledge — the kind that holds when the circumstances are hard. It is not theoretical. It is tested.

Notice what both of those presentations share. The knowledge they describe is not merely interesting. It is actionable. It changes how a man responds to himself and to the world. One showed us where self-mastery must begin — inside, in honest self-examination. The other showed us what that self-mastery looks like

when the pressure arrives.

The progression — from the examined man to the tested man — is not accidental. It is the Masonic sequence. And it is exactly the thread our book club will continue with two works that belong squarely in this tradition — one drawn from the ancient Greek Stoic tradition, the other from the Toltec wisdom tradition of Mesoamerica. Different cultures, different centuries, different languages — yet both arriving at the same conviction: that the examined life, deliberately lived, is the only foundation worth building on.

THE BOOK CLUB

The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz. It begins with a deceptively simple observation: that most of us spend our lives living by agreements we never consciously chose — beliefs installed in us in childhood, by culture, by fear. The first agreement — *Be impeccable with your word* — is not a politeness tip. It is a call to the same self-examination the Oracle demanded at Delphi. Who are you, really, when no one is listening? What do you actually believe? Ruiz is asking us to audit the interior — to identify the agreements that no longer serve us and replace them with ones we have deliberately chosen. That is the rough ashlar put to the gavel.

How to Be a Stoic by Massimo Pigliucci. This book brings us into direct conversation with Marcus Aurelius and other Stoic philosophers, and the tradition that shaped some of the greatest moral actors in Western history. The author asks what it would mean to actually live Stoic principles today — to distinguish what is within our power from what is not, to anchor our identity in virtue rather than outcome, to meet adversity with steadiness rather than reaction. The Irish brethren of 1922 demonstrated those principles under extraordinary pressure, whether they would have named them Stoic or not. The book gives us the language and the framework to practice that discipline

deliberately, before the crisis arrives.

CLOSING

Brothers, useful knowledge is not stored. It is practiced. It is the map that changes your journey, not the one that decorates your wall.

The Opening Charge invites us to pursue it with *zeal*. I invite you to bring that zeal to our book club this summer where we will discuss and wrestle with these two books together. I encourage every one of you to join us — for useful Masonic knowledge, and for the fellowship that makes this lodge worth belonging to.

Worshipful Master, thank you.