

The Symbol of Our Faith

BY PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY



Following the renovation of the Mesa Arizona Temple some years ago, clergy of other religions were invited to tour it on the first day of the open house period. Hundreds responded. In speaking to them, I said we would be pleased to answer any queries they might have. Among these was one from a Protestant minister.

Said he: "I've been all through this building, this temple which carries on its face the name of Jesus Christ, but nowhere have I seen any representation of the cross, the symbol of Christianity. I have noted your buildings elsewhere and likewise find an absence of the cross. Why is this when you say you believe in Jesus Christ?"

I responded: "I do not wish to give offense to any of my Christian colleagues who use the cross on the steeples of their cathedrals and at the altars of their chapels, who wear it on their vestments, and imprint it on their books and other literature. But for us, the cross is the symbol of the dying Christ, while our message is a declaration of the Living Christ."

He then asked: "If you do not use the cross, what is the symbol of your religion?"

I replied that the lives of our people must become the most meaningful expression of our faith and, in fact, therefore, the symbol of our worship.

I hope he did not feel that I was smug or self-righteous in my response. Our position at first glance may seem a contradiction of our profession that Jesus Christ is the key figure of our faith. The official name of the Church is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We worship Him as Lord and Savior. The Bible is our scripture. We believe that the prophets of the Old Testament who foretold the coming of the Messiah spoke under divine inspiration. We glory in the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John setting forth the events of the birth, ministry, death, and Resurrection of the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh. Like Paul of old, we are "not ashamed of the gospel of [Jesus] Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). And like Peter, we affirm that Jesus Christ is the only name "given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The Book of Mormon, which we regard as the testament of the New World, setting forth the teachings of prophets who lived anciently in the Western Hemisphere, testifies of Him who was born in Bethlehem of Judea and who died on the hill of Calvary. To a world wavering in its faith, the Book of Mormon is another and powerful witness of the divinity of the Lord. Its

very preface, written by a prophet who walked the Americas a millennium and a half ago, categorically states that it was written “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.”

And in our book of modern revelation, the Doctrine and Covenants, He has declared Himself in these certain words: “I am Alpha and Omega, Christ the Lord; yea, even I am he, the beginning and the end, the Redeemer of the world” (D&C 19:1).

In light of such declarations, in view of such testimony, well might many ask, as my minister friend in Arizona asked, if you profess a belief in Jesus Christ, why do you not use the symbol of His death, the cross of Calvary?

To which I must first reply that no member of this Church must ever forget the terrible price paid by our Redeemer, who gave His life that all men might live—the agony of Gethsemane, the bitter mockery of His trial, the vicious crown of thorns tearing at His flesh, the blood cry of the mob before Pilate, the lonely burden of His heavy walk along the way to Calvary, the terrifying pain as great nails pierced His hands and feet, the fevered torture of His body as He hung that tragic day, the Son of God crying out, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

This was the cross, the instrument of His torture, the terrible device designed to destroy the Man of Peace, the evil recompense for His miraculous work of healing the sick, of causing the blind to see, of raising the dead. This was the cross on which He hung and died on Golgotha’s lonely summit.

We cannot forget that. We must never forget it, for here our Savior, our Redeemer, the Son of God, gave Himself, a vicarious sacrifice for each of us. But the gloom of that dark evening before the Jewish Sabbath, when His lifeless body was taken down and hurriedly laid in a borrowed tomb, drained away the hope of even His most ardent and knowing disciples. They were bereft, not understanding what He had told them earlier. Dead was the Messiah, in whom they believed. Gone was their Master, in whom they had placed all of their longing, their faith, their hope. He who had spoken of everlasting life, He who had raised Lazarus from the grave, now had died as surely as all men before Him had died. Now had come the end to His sorrowful, brief life. That life had been as Isaiah had long before foretold: He was “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. ... He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him” (Isa. 53:3, 5). Now He was gone.

We can only speculate on the feelings of those who loved Him as they pondered His death during the long hours of the Jewish Sabbath, the Saturday of our calendar.

Then dawned the first day of the week, the Sabbath of the Lord as we have come to know it. To those who came to the tomb, heavy with sorrow, the attending angel declared, “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5).

“He is not here: ... he is risen, as he said” (Matt. 28:6).

Here was the greatest miracle of human history. Earlier He had told them, “I am the resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25). But they had not understood. Now they knew. He had died in misery and pain and loneliness. Now, on the third day, He arose in power and beauty and life, the firstfruits of all who slept, the assurance for men of all ages that “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).

On Calvary He was the dying Jesus. From the tomb He emerged the Living Christ. The cross had been the bitter fruit of Judas's betrayal, the summary of Peter's denial. The empty tomb now became the testimony of His divinity, the assurance of eternal life, the answer to Job's unanswered question: "If a man die, shall he live again?" ([Job 14:14](#)).

Having died, He might have been forgotten, or, at best, remembered as one of many great teachers whose lives are epitomized in a few lines in the books of history.

Now, having been resurrected, He became the Master of life. Now, with Isaiah, His disciples could sing with certain faith, "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" ([Isa. 9:6](#)).

Fulfilled were the expectant words of Job: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

"And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:

"Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me" ([Job 19:25-27](#)).

Well did Mary cry, "Rabboni; which is to say, Master" ([John 20:16](#)) when first she saw the risen Lord, for Master now He was in very deed, Master not only of life, but of death itself. Gone was the sting of death, broken the victory of the grave.

The fearful Peter was transformed. Even the doubtful Thomas declared in soberness and reverence and realism, "My Lord and my God" ([John 20:28](#)). "Be not faithless, but believing" ([John 20:27](#)) were the unforgettable words of the Lord on that marvelous occasion.

There followed appearances to many, including, as Paul records, "above five hundred brethren at once" ([1 Cor. 15:6](#)).

And in the Western Hemisphere were other sheep of whom He had spoken earlier. And the people there "heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; ... and it said unto them:

"Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him.

"... And behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them. ...

"And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:

"Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified [should] come into the world. ...

"Arise and come forth unto me" ([3 Ne. 11:3, 6-10, 14](#)).

Then follow in this beautiful account many words of the ministry of the resurrected Lord among the people of ancient America.

And now finally there are modern witnesses, for He came again to open this dispensation, the dispensation of the prophesied fulness of times. In a glorious vision, He—the resurrected, living Lord—and His Father, the God of heaven, appeared to a boy prophet to begin anew the Restoration of ancient truth. There followed a veritable "cloud of witnesses"

([Heb. 12:1](#)), and he who had been the recipient of the First Vision—[Joseph Smith](#), the modern prophet—declared with words of soberness:

“And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

“For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

“That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God” ([D&C 76:22-24](#)).

To which may be added the witness of millions who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, have borne and now bear solemn testimony of His living reality. That testimony has been their comfort and their strength.

For instance, I think of a friend I came to know in Vietnam during times of great trouble in his land. He was a man of quiet and transcendent faith in God, our Eternal Father, and in His Son, the Living Christ. Well do I recall hearing him sing, with deep conviction,

*When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not thee o'erflow,
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

(“How Firm a Foundation,” *Hymns*, no. 85)

And so, because our Savior lives, we do not use the symbol of His death as the symbol of our faith. But what shall we use? No sign, no work of art, no representation of form is adequate to express the glory and the wonder of the Living Christ. He told us what that symbol should be when He said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” ([John 14:15](#)).

As His followers, we cannot do a mean or shoddy or ungracious thing without tarnishing His image. Nor can we do a good and gracious and generous act without burnishing more brightly the symbol of Him whose name we have taken upon ourselves. And so our lives must become a meaningful expression, the symbol of our declaration of our testimony of the Living Christ, the Eternal Son of the Living God.

It is that simple, my brethren and sisters, and that profound and we'd better never forget it.

*I know that my Redeemer lives,
Triumphant Savior, Son of God,
Victorious over pain and death,
My King, my Leader, and my Lord.*

*He lives, my one sure rock of faith,
The one bright hope of men on earth,
The beacon to a better way,
The light beyond the veil of death.*

Oh, give me thy sweet Spirit still,

*The peace that comes alone from thee,
The faith to walk the lonely road
That leads to thine eternity.*

(Gordon B. Hinckley, "My Redeemer Lives," *Hymns*, no. 135)