

## Homilies, Slogans, Proverbs, Rhetoric, and other Masonic stuff....



I'm sure you've heard it said.....*Masonry is a way of life.* Technically, that's a homily. A homily is an inspirational catchphrase that is less than a proverb and not as obvious as a slogan. *Making good men, better*, is a slogan. *A bird in hand is worth two in the bush*, is a proverb. Proverbs express universally accepted wisdom; slogans capture ideas; homilies are 'feel good' statements. A homily makes us feel good inside because we believe it says something about us; it is inspirational. Our homily says to us, "Masonry is a way of life". We are Masons. We live a Masonic way of life."

Whether you realize it or not, we just reached that conclusion by the means of Rhetoric, the second of the seven Liberal Arts and Sciences that are passed along to all Fellowcrafts as they climb the winding stairs. Rhetoric teaches the art of critical thinking to arrive at sound foundations in thinking and expressing our thoughts. Having a sound foundation in how we think may be even more important than what we think about. Critical thinking allows us to negotiate our way among slogans and homilies and other ideas to arrive at deeper truths about life; and ourselves.....and that destination is called wisdom.

That seems to be an obvious conclusion for us (at least, it feels good, anyway), but rhetoric teaches us to challenge the formula to arrive at deeper understandings and truths about things. Does A+B equal C under all conditions? Do all Masons live a Masonic way of life? Can one be a Mason and not live a Masonic way of life? Can one live a Masonic way of life without being a Mason? These are examples of rhetorical questions generated by the logic of critical thinking; their answers test the logical truths of our original thought.

So, now a closer look at our rhetorical question, 'Can one live a Masonic way of life without being a Mason? We would try to understand the fundamental ideas in its parts. We would look for the attributes of Masonry and the Masonic way of life and then compare them to any uniqueness that we derive in being or not being a Mason. For example, logic says that to enjoy the Masonic way of life one must be a Mason. But there are three degrees of Masonry, can all degrees enjoy the same Masonic way of life, or is full enjoyment dependent upon being a Master Mason? Can a lesser degree enjoy a lesser Masonic way of life, and is there such a thing? More questions! and we still haven't even determined if a Masonic way of life is unique only to Masons.

By now, we may all have the beginnings of an Excedrin headache - I do! This rhetorical stuff can give new meaning to the word migraine! But rhetoric is important because words and ideas are sometimes really sneaky things; they shift and change their meanings depending on how they are put together. And rhetoric is a two-way street.

Really clever people in business, advertising, and particularly those in politics, use the art of rhetoric to influence us every day. When we accept their slogans and inspirational catchphrases without thinking, without critical understanding of their underlying meanings, we are in danger. They can be used to sway us and set us off on a path we never intended to take, and that is how individuals and states and nations can be manipulated against their better judgment for an objective in which they don't really believe.

Without practicing the art of critical thinking, how can we detect the underlying truth of things? Without understanding how rhetoric can be used to come at us, how will we protect ourselves against being led down the wrong paths by clever words?

Masonry's answer points us to the toolset of the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences as a means to become better men. Among them, Rhetoric is a Mason's working tool that teaches us to think, to critically examine and test assumptions about life and about ourselves. It helps us choose a 'way of life' among the many paths spread out before us, and helps guard against taking wrong path. Ultimately, Rhetoric is a tool that helps point the way toward wisdom. But, we have to reach in and use the tool to benefit from it; wisdom does not come without work.

Freemasonry is kindness in the home, honesty in business, courtesy in society, fairness in work, concern for the unfortunate, resistance toward evil, help for the weak, forgiveness for the penitent, love for one another, and above all reverence and love of God.

Freemasonry is many things, but, most of all: Masonry really is a way of life, and that's *not just* a homily.

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