“Why the Royal Arch Is Called the Completion of the Master Mason Degree”

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Brethren,

Tonight I want to talk about a question that is simple on the surface, but becomes much more interesting the longer we think about it:

Why is the Royal Arch often described as the completion of the Master Mason Degree?

Before I give you my answer, I want to ask the newer Companions here a question:

When you completed your Master Mason Degree, did you feel like the story was completely finished?

Take a moment and think about that.

The Master Mason Degree brings us to one of the most important moments in all of Freemasonry. We are confronted with death, loss, and the consequences of mortality. We learn that even the greatest achievements of man are temporary. The Temple is no longer simply a building in the story; it becomes a symbol of ourselves and the work we are supposed to be doing within our own lives.

But there is something interesting about the conclusion of the Master Mason Degree.

Something is missing.

The Mason is left with questions. There is a loss that has occurred, and although we have been given important lessons, there remains something that has not yet been recovered.

And this is where the Royal Arch becomes significant.

Historically, Freemasonry did not always exist in the elaborate degree system that we know today. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, speculative Freemasonry developed beyond the traditions of operative stonemasons. As Freemasonry expanded, additional ceremonies and degrees developed to explore subjects that were not fully addressed in the original three degrees.

The Royal Arch eventually became one of the most important of these developments.

In fact, early Freemasonry did not always make the sharp separation between the Master Mason Degree and Royal Arch that we recognize today. In eighteenth-century England, Royal Arch Masonry developed alongside and, in some places, within the broader development of the Master

Mason tradition. Over time, the Royal Arch became a distinct degree and an essential part of what became known as the York Rite.

And this brings us back to the word completion.

The Master Mason Degree leaves us standing in the aftermath of loss. The Royal Arch takes us beyond that loss and continues the search.

The symbolism is powerful.

The Master Mason is confronted with something that has been lost.

The Royal Arch Mason searches for it.

And ultimately, he discovers something that he could not have discovered without first experiencing the loss.

So perhaps the Royal Arch does not simply "add another degree" to Masonry.

Perhaps it finishes a story that the Master Mason Degree intentionally leaves unfinished.

Let me ask another question:

If the Master Mason Degree teaches us that something has been lost, what do you think the Royal Arch teaches us about what it means to search?

Is the lesson simply about recovering something?

Or is there something deeper happening to the man who undertakes the search?

I would argue that the latter is closer to the heart of the Royal Arch.

Freemasonry frequently uses architecture as a metaphor for human development. We begin as rough material. Through instruction, discipline, morality, and experience, we attempt to improve ourselves.

But life does not always proceed in a straight line.

We experience failure. We experience loss. We encounter questions for which we do not immediately have answers.

The Royal Arch gives us a powerful Masonic response to those experiences:

Do not stop searching.

The Master Mason Degree teaches us about mortality and the limitations of man. The Royal Arch reminds us that the story does not necessarily end with what has been lost.

There is a movement from death toward discovery, from loss toward restoration, and from uncertainty toward greater understanding.

That is one reason the Royal Arch has held such an important place in the York Rite.

But I want to leave the Companions with one final question.

What is your Lost Word?

I don't mean the ritual answer.

I mean personally.

What is the thing you are still searching for?

Is it knowledge?

Purpose?

Wisdom?

A better understanding of God?

A better understanding of yourself?

Perhaps the Royal Arch teaches us that Freemasonry is not about being given every answer. It is about becoming the kind of man who is willing to keep searching for them.

The Master Mason Degree gives us the foundation.

The Royal Arch takes us further into the Temple.

And perhaps that is why we call it the completion of the Master Mason Degree, not because our journey as Masons is finished, but because we have finally learned that the search itself is part of the journey.

So, Companions, I will leave you with this:

If you believe that something has been lost, are you willing to spend the rest of your Masonic journey searching for it?

Thank you, Companions.