
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 425

1931 April 11

Schenectady, NY - Odd Fellows Convention

At Odd Fellows' Convention, State Armory, Schenectady,
April 11, 1931

The Cardinal Principles of Odd Fellowship

P-720

If there is any originality about Odd Fellowship it is the application of certain principles to this and past ages of dramatization we see as we pass through the various stages with dramatization of certain characters who are controlled by certain principles. These principles are old and so we cannot claim originality for Odd Fellowship; but they have taught us three things that are outstanding in the Order:

1. Democracy. When a man joins the Odd Fellows he is not asked about his religious convictions. It does not matter to what church he belongs. The supreme question is, does he believe in God. He is not asked to subscribe to any sect or creed or class or race distinction.

2. Altruism. Altruism is just thinking as much of the other fellow as you do of yourself. Read the wonderful story of Jonathan and David. Watch King Saul as he shows his jealousy in trying to do away with the shepherd boy. As you watch the story move with rapidity and passion, would it not seem to you that the natural thing for Jonathan to do would be to take his father's side and thus save his crown? It is said that blood runs thicker

than water. In this case Jonathan would stand by his father and thus be certain of becoming King of Israel. But he did not do this. He was altruistic enough to consider his needy friend and stand by him in his hours of distress, and in so doing he literally threw away his crown. But what does this matter when one has learned the supreme lesson of altruism.

3. This world is sick. Every man seems to be demanding his pound of flesh. The barriers of religion are not yet broken down. Political wiles and schemes still prevail. Class distinction is still prominent. Race hatred is rampant. And one raises the question, how is the world to be cured of its illness? The answer can be given in one word—Fraternity,—and upon whose shoulders rests the responsibility of administering this panacea for the world's ills.

These three things I have mentioned are enough to cause us to admire those who are working for fraternities.

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows was born for a great purpose and to meet these needs of mankind—its three great cardinal principles which uplift it before the world. It endeavors to instill, cultivate and develop in the lives of all its members these principles which we believe are fundamental to the happiness of each individual and through him, to his community, state and nation. This magnificent Order appeared in this country a little more than a hundred years ago. Before that it had existed in England, from which a charter was obtained for the organization of Washington Lodge No. 1 in the City of Baltimore in 1819. Tom Wilkey was a great and moving spirit in the beginning. He and four companions launched our noble Order and from that beginning the membership has grown and spread to almost every land. Today we number almost two and a half million, including the Rebeccas. The Rebecca Degree was inaugurated for women in 1851. Now they have nearly ten thousand lodges and a membership of nearly nine hundred thousand. The Oddfellows have sixty-eight Grand Lodges; fifty-six Grand Encampments; seventeen thousand Subordinate Lodges and more than three thousand Subordinate Encampments. The Order owns and operates fifty-seven homes for orphans, widows and needy, which are relieving the distress of about four thousand five hundred dependent worthy individuals. The record of our relief work cannot be suppressed. Last year the total relief paid, reached, I am told, the colossal sum of eight million dollars. That means twenty-one thousand dollars per day or nine thousand dollars per hour. With swelling pride we review our record in the realm of benevolence. This giant of the fraternal world was born into our country during troublesome times. The war of 1812 had just ended. The Monroe Doctrine had some times. The war of 1812 had just ended. The whole world was in been inaugurated to protect American interest. The whole world was in been sweeping our own nation. It was a time of social distress and an anti-turmoil, with class arrayed against class. Bitterness, jealousy and hatred dot was the supreme need of the hour. People began to seek a remedy. They believed the fundamental principles of brotherhood were being neglected. In their extremity, for the purpose of teaching and emphasizing these principles the Order of Odd Fellows was called into existence. As foundation, principles of life, this letter puts forth and emphasizes three essentials—Friendship, Love and Truth.

Friendship is the most valued possession of mankind. To obtain material for lessons on this theme, recourse was had to the most valuable book in the world—the Bible. The story of David and Jonathan was chosen, for there is nowhere any truer or more beautiful story of friendship than that which existed between these two men. In the midst of the selfish ambitions, envies and hatred of his father, and the conditions of those times, Jonathan, although endangering his life by so doing, remained a true and faithful friend to David.

Love was the second great essential,—of these times and of all times. To teach this the parable of the Good Samaritan was chosen, and no more urgent lesson is needed in the world today. The teaching of this parable in all its beauty will surely adjust and remove every human difficulty, whether racial, industrial, political or religious. It will completely break down every barrier that separates the interest of humanity.

The last of these great essentials is Truth. It has a place of tremendous emphasis. The great Teacher has said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the

truth shall make you free." So, my brothers, do not become overheated in argument in any realm, be it social, industrial, political or religious, for Truth will survive. Therefore be moderate. Truth will not wear out, and it needs no heated defense.

In conclusion let me add we do not claim perfection for our noble Order nor offer to the world a plan of salvation. We recognize the glory and dignity of the church as supreme. There is no conflict nor antagonism between our teachings. We are both doing the same great work. Our Order is temporary for a time only. The church is eternal. Therefore let us combine these two for a perfect citizen; then we will have no worry, for as the man is so will he reflect in his local community, his state and his nation.