

## **A hat and a stone – our journey to Knighthood**

Last time I spoke to you, I talked about some of the words you heard during your installation as a new Knight – Golgotha and Maher Shalal Hash Baz. This time I am going to explain the significance of some of the objects you came into contact with during your journey.

So, where to start this time....

### ***The Pilgrim's Hat***

When a candidate to the Knight Templar degree first appears in our company, he is expected to wear an interesting set of garments such as a cocked hat with a large shell on an upturned brim.

A shell on an upturned brim? How many of us have looked at it and actually wondered why? One question that we should be able to answer is why such a shell was first used to signify 'a pilgrim on his travels, weary and fatigued'.

To answer that question, you must have an understanding of Compostela, one of the most famous places of pilgrimage in the whole of medieval Europe. It was located near the coast of Galicia, a province in the northwest of Spain.

From the ninth century AD, the church encouraged visitors to honour the relics of Saint James the Apostle who, it is believed, was brought to shore by boat.

The story suggests that when the people of Jerusalem killed Saint James, the disciples took his body to the seashore. There, they discovered a small ship had been moored by divine dispensation.

Boarding the vessel, which had no sail or rudder, the ship arrived in Galicia several days later by the guidance of an angel. The body of Saint James was buried in the village of Compostela and attracted visitors who came to pray or be healed by the Saint. We call them pilgrims.

After the invasion of the Spanish peninsula by the Moors, Compostela became a sacred place for Christians and pilgrim worshippers came from all over Europe to honour the resting place of a brother of the Lord.

During the Battle of Hastings, King William of England fought on a horse brought for him by a knight who had been a pilgrim to Santiago. Santiago was the more common name for the shrine at Compostela. This was because 'Sant iago' was the local name for Saint James, being the Spanish derivation from the Latin form 'Sanctus Jacobus'.

Only kings and nobles could obtain special relics during their visits to Compostela, the lesser folk having to make do with less precious objects found on the seashore in the neighbourhood of the saint's tomb.

Such objects consisted of scallop shells and a black mineral called jet. (who knew Whitby extended that far!)

The cockleshell became the saint's emblem and was worn as proof, if it was required, that the pilgrimage had been successful. It was a symbol of sacrifice and devotion, and, in that time, became a symbol that represented not just the journey to Spain, but that of a pilgrimage anywhere in the world.

The famous Spanish hero, El Cid, wore a shell on his girdle!

However, the usual setting for the shell was on the upturned brim of a large hat specially chosen to protect a traveller from the glaring heat of the sun. The shell was supposed to be worn facing the brow and not to the side. It was a badge to be proud of.

Another legend regarding the adoption of the shell also exists. When the disciples accompanying the saint's body reached their landing place in Galicia, a marriage party was being held close by.

As the boat was slowly approaching, the bridegroom's horse took fright and rushed into the sea. When the horse rose to the surface, its rider was covered in shells. One of the disciples responded by throwing water over the rider, and in doing so baptised him in the name of the Lord.

Therefore, the shells became a sign that God's work through Saint James had begun. To wear a shell meant allying oneself with the saint's work. When Hugues de Payen, the leader of the first Knights Templar, established the Order for the purpose of protecting pilgrims who made their way to the Holy Land, the shell understandably carried a great deal of meaning for them.

One of the qualities that we look for in our candidates is men who have sought to do good, but are also ready and willing to make a further journey to prove themselves as worthy companions of the Christian Knights of the Temple. That accomplished, they will discard the cockleshell, and in adopting the mantle of the ultimate 'Good Samaritan', be better prepared to assist those who want to travel along the paths that lead to God's service and truth.

So....that's the first part of our journey to Knighthood. But what else do we encounter on the way?

### ***A small white stone***

You may recall during the installation ceremony that the candidate is asked to inscribe his name on the Mystical Stone.

Immediately afterwards, the Marshal (a fine chap) presents him with a small white stone of which the Preceptor says: 'You will carefully preserve that memorial.....for it is to be your sign of admission to any other Knight Templar Preceptory'.

The question then arises, why is this a significant talisman and why do we receive it in what appears to be such an unusual manner? We shall find the answer in the Bible.

In the whole of the Scripture, the white stone is only mentioned in the Book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament. In Chapter 2, verse 7, this is what we read:

*'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.'*

The last book of the Bible was composed at a time when the earliest followers of Jesus Christ were being subjected to harsh persecution and suffering under the Roman emperor, Diocletian. It was doubtlessly written to encourage and strengthen those followers even if the words that the author used may seem to us very unusual.

Almost certainly they understood much more from this collection of allegories than we may do because they were more familiar with the writings of the Old Testament from which the author took his images. Even so some things are very clear.

The stone that was handed to us is white because it is to be a mark of true perfection and purity. In the light of this interpretation, it can only refer to one who is and ever has been sinless. It thus refers to one who is the figure of God himself, unseen but revealed to men of faith.

If you were to visit the palace of the Escorial outside Madrid and see the ceiling of the library, you would observe Christ seated on a white cubic stone.

The stone was also this perfect shape – a cube – because it represented to the first Jewish disciples that part of the Temple, which was itself a perfect cube, the part known as the Holy of Holies or Sanctum Sanctorum.

This reference was not lost on the first Knights Templar who may have started their sojourn in Jerusalem by searching the very site where the Holy of Holies once stood. They would have known the story of events at the crucifixion when the veil of the Sanctum Sanctorum was torn open and access was made available to all faithful believers.

The stone therefore represents to the knights the nature and purpose of Christ himself and this was its meaning for those who first received the words of the Book of Revelation. When a present day knight receives the stone, it is most precious because it is a symbol of the Lord himself and He alone can open the door to any Preceptory that is consecrated in His name.

The stone is also thus a key.

However, there is something more that we have to learn about the receipt of this stone. If you read an earlier passage in the second chapter of the Book of Revelation, you will note something else. In verse 16, it reads:

*'I will come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.'*

It was unquestionably the close proximity of this verse and the one mentioned before that led our ritual makers to adopt the custom of presenting the white stone with which we are familiar.

God's word comes to us, says St John, in the form of Jesus Christ, and this word in another well-known passage of St Paul's, is likened to a two edged sword – as is the Spirit, which gives the word utterance. So when the Marshal points his sword down at our open hand (and ideally holding the hilt of the sword to his mouth) and runs the stone along the blade, he is perfectly representing what the Book of Revelation has said to us.

The small white stone, God's final revelation to us, has a word from within sent to us from his mouth by the two edged sword that is his gospel. Christ is symbolically made our possession and the means of our entry into any and every other Preceptory.

Let us receive him as God's word to us and respectfully and carefully keep that stone. It is full of meaning!