



The Pythian Story

History of the Order

The Order of Knights of Pythias is a great international fraternity which was founded in Washington, DC, February 19, 1864, by [Justus H. Rathbone](#), and embraces more than two thousand subordinate lodges in the United States and Canada, with occasional lodges having been formed elsewhere. The primary object of fraternal organizations is to promote friendship among men and to relieve suffering. Each organization adopts some outstanding principle as its objective. The individuality of an order is determined by its ideal sentiment. The distinguishing principles of the Order of Knights of Pythias are "FRIENDSHIP, CHARITY and BENEVOLENCE".

It bases its lessons and builds its ritual largely on the familiar story of the friendship of Damon and Pythias, who were historical characters living about four hundred or more years before the beginning of the Christian era. They were members of a school, founded by Pythagoras, who was known as the father of Greek philosophy.



Damon and Pythias

To become a member of the Pythagorean Brotherhood, certain very rigorous tests were demanded and applied, some of which are very similar to the ritualistic work of our order today. The object of the organization was the moral uplifting and purification of society. Strict morality, absolute truthfulness, honor and integrity were thoroughly inculcated in the minds of its membership. It was a maxim of Pythagoras that the two most excellent things for man were "to speak the truth and to render benefits to each other" The outstanding feature of the society, however, was the marvelous friendship and loyalty which bound the brotherhood together with hoops of steel, which was so remarkably demonstrated in the incident which forms the historic basis of our order.

Damon had opposed the pretensions of the king of Syracuse, who had gained the throne by fraud, and as a result he was condemned to death. Pythias became a hostage for Damon, while the latter was permitted his liberty to bid his wife and child goodbye. Each was willing to die to save the other's life. Their loyalty to each other, the adventures that beset them, and the outcome of this noble friendship, form the basis for one of the most beautiful stories of history as exemplified in our ritual.

The Drama - *Damon and Pythias*

John Banim, Irish poet and dramatist, wrote a play based on this friendship, which was first produced in London in 1821, and has since been staged many hundreds of times.

Familiarity with the Banim play encouraged Justus H. Rathbone to organize a fraternal order on the basis of such friendship. Its first small group of members took the vows of the new order with their hands placed upon a pocket Bible that had been given Mr. Rathbone by his mother. This Bible is still cherished as a treasured relic of the Order, and many thousands of others have been privileged to become members in what is known as "Rathbone Bible Classes" the original Bible being used to obligate them.

Abraham Lincoln and Our Ritual

The Order began, of course, during the Civil War, and its founder believed that it might do much to heal the wounds and allay the hatred of civil conflict. President Abraham Lincoln, being advised of the contents of the ritual and its teaching, said: "The purposes of your organization are most wonderful. If we could but bring its spirit to all our citizenry, what a wonderful thing it would be. It breathes the spirit of Friendship, Charity and Benevolence. It is one

of the best agencies conceived for the upholding of government, honoring the flag, for the reuniting of our brethren of the North and of the South, for teaching the people to love one another, and portraying the sanctity of the home and loved ones. I would suggest that these great principles be perpetuated and that you go to the Congress of the United States and ask for a charter, and so organize on a great scale throughout this nation, and disseminate this wonderful work that you have so nobly started. I will do all in my power to assist you in this application and with your work."

The suggestion made by the President was adopted. An application was made to Congress for a charter, and the Order of Knights of Pythias was the first American Order ever chartered by an Act of the Congress of the United States.

In the Order's ritualistic work, every sentence has a meaning and every paragraph a beautiful and inspiring lesson. The flag of the country has an honored place at every meeting and the Holy Bible is the supreme Book of Law. The Order does not seek to shape any man's creed, but Pythianism is the practical application of religious and charitable principles to every day life. We have a heritage of which we are proud and our precepts and teachings lead men to higher ideals of life. We invite like minded men of good character to join us in making these ideals the dominant factor in modern living.

Peace Through Understanding

The Knights of Pythias is dedicated to the cause of universal peace and is pledged to the promotion of understanding among men of good will as the surest means of attaining it.

We believe that any two men, believers in a Supreme Being, meeting in a spirit of good will in an honest effort to understand each other, can live together in peace and harmony.

We seek those who agree with this belief to apply for membership in the Knights of Pythias and join us in an effort to reach "[Peace Through Understanding](#)."