

# The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Today we hear a lot about so-called 'cancel culture.' If you say the wrong thing (whoever determines what that is) you can be taken off of social media, lose your job, get kicked out of college, etc. Did you know that in church there has been something akin to cancel culture with regard to certain hymns? Recently I was reading a sermon posted online by a Lutheran minister in which he said that he was happy that 'Onward, Christian Soldiers' had been removed (i.e. cancelled) from his denomination's official hymnal, because it and others like it are, in his opinion, too militaristic and therefore 'violent.' Apparently the story goes that it was sung as a rallying song at some point by angry and violent Protestants in Northern Ireland, or something like that, and so that means that if *we* today sing it someone listening will be lead to commit acts of violence, and so it is probably best to just get rid of it altogether! This kind of shallow thinking really gets tiresome after a while. The problem is that the words of that hymn have absolutely nothing to do with people fighting each other in battles and wars. *It is about spiritual warfare against the devil.* Critics of the hymn certainly do not read very closely, and they are obviously unfamiliar with the New Testament which uses military/warfare imagery throughout as a metaphor for our spiritual journey. But even if a few psychotic nut jobs used this classic hymn at some point as a battle song, so what? Does that mean the rest of us should stop singing it? Hardly. I am reminded of a person complaining to me years ago about how rainbows had been co-opted by the gay rights movement, and that therefore she could no longer use rainbow stickers or decorations without everything thinking she was a lesbian. Surely a lot of people feel that way about the rainbow. But when it all boils down, who cares what other people may or may not think about us, or how they may twist some symbol or work of art to suit a sinful agenda? I have heard of Christians refusing to celebrate Christmas and Easter because "Madison Avenue" ruins them... perverting them by turning them into festivals of consumerism. To me that is rubbish. That may indeed happen, but I am not going to let that ruin my Christian observance of those Christian Holy Days (holidays)! So why would should we let *the mere possibility* that a hymn *might* provoke someone to violence stop us (who understand its true meaning because we take time to actually read all of the words) from singing it? Professional sports matches provoke many people to commit acts of violence. Should football, soccer, etc. be cancelled because of the actions of a few wackos? I doubt it. Christians are called to be *thinking* people. Christian faith and life is fundamentally rational. The minute we stop thinking about our faith and life, or allow some demagogue or media organization to do our thinking for us, we are dead in the water. Indeed, we need less emotional 'reacting' and more clear and concise thinking about the spiritual life. Let us always strive to be thinking people. Faith and reason go hand in hand.

Faithfully, your priest, *J. Gordon Anderson*

April 2023

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UPCOMING PRAYER BOOK  
HOLY DAYS:

**Apr. 2nd - 8th - Holy Week**

To be announced

**Apr. 10th & 11th - Easter  
Monday & Tuesday**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Apr. 25th - St. Mark**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**May 1st - Ss. Philip & James**

Holy Communion at 10:00a.m.

**May 15th-16th - Rogation  
Days**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**May 18th - Ascension Day**

Holy Communion at 6:30 p.m.

**May 29th-30th - Monday &  
Tuesday in Whitsun Week**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Please see the parish website for the complete list of Sunday and Holy Day services offered each month.

[www.saintalbansjoppa.org](http://www.saintalbansjoppa.org)

BUILDING PROJECT: *The Story of St. Francis' Anglican Church Offers Clues to Our Future*

As most of you know, before coming to St. Alban's to serve as rector I was priest-in-charge for about two years at a small mission parish in Blacksburg, Virginia called St. Francis. The church was founded around the same time as we were (early 1980's) by a bunch of Episcopalians who were not happy with the direction their denomination began going in the mid-late 1970's. They started off strong and were able to buy an old Roman Catholic church building right in the downtown district about two blocks from Virginia Tech. Over the years, however, the parish began to decline. By the time I got there they had dwindled down to about twelve people and had not had a full time priest in ten years. Stepping out in faith, they took out a line of credit against their rather nice property to help pay my salary. So Valerie and I (no kids yet) moved from St. Mark's Church in Vero Beach, Florida, where I had been serving as curate, up to the beautiful New River Valley and to St. Francis Anglican Church.

The first thing that I noticed upon entering the church was that the place had basically become a dump. The nave was clean enough, though extremely plain and lackluster. The parish hall was a nightmare. As you walked in you were welcomed by a gaping hole in the ceiling. On the 1970's wood paneled wall next to the hole was a large photographed portrait of the long-dead bishop for whom the hall was named. The glass was covered with mold. In fact the entire parish hall reeked of mold. Since there was no full time priest for so long the place was always closed up during the week, and since there was no air conditioning the place got really yucky smelling. The floors were covered with old, gray institutional carpeting that was full of stains and filth. The hall was divided up into several small rooms, each one containing untold amounts of useless junk. In the office catalogs and old bulletins were piled up everywhere. The nursery was like something out of a horror movie. Unfortunately the parishioners had grown used to how disgusting and messy the place was and were not even aware that it was a problem. They were shocked to learn that people in the community thought the church was just an old, abandoned building! The dirty old building was not welcoming and was clearly one of the obstacles to the parish growing.

So we rolled up our sleeves and began renovating the church and parish hall. We ripped up the awful carpeting and had the beautiful original oak floors underneath restored. The nursery was completely repainted and refurnished. All of the junk littering the rooms was thrown away. (As I recall there were at least three gigantic bags of trash taken out of the office

alone!) The hole in the ceiling was fixed and the rooms were given fresh coats of paint. We even did a lot of renovations in the church to make it nicer: we had the piano tuned (for the first time in decades) and moved it from the parish hall into the church so we could use it for special music, and we also had the organ repaired, parts of which had stopped working.

Not only did we renovate the building, we also got more involved in the community by allowing groups to meet at the church and supporting local ministries, created an online presence, printed informational literature, decorated the church yard, beefed up our college campus ministry, and so much more. Through all of this we basically doubled in size, going from 12 to 25+ people regularly attending. Our college group was very successful with a total of about 12 college kids. But then in December of 2010 God called us to come to St. Alban's. My immediate successor at St. Francis, an elderly priest, was not able to keep the momentum going, and so once again the church began to go into decline. But after him came their new and current priest, Fr. Wade Miller, who, with his great experience and leadership revived everything, and took the church from what I had made to the next level. Under his leadership the church finished all of its interior and exterior renovations and continued its outreach in the community. And so nowadays they (St. Philip's... they decided to change their name) get 70+ people at a single Sunday service! I got that maybe *once* when I was there... on an Easter Sunday.

Now, why am I telling this story, and how does it relate to our building project? The answer is because what we did at that church under my leadership paved the way for what was to come later under new lay and clerical leaders. So for us here at St. Alban's, while we might not need lots of extra parking and interior space right now, we should recall that we *did* need it three years ago before the pandemic ruined everything. And we need to be looking ahead and realize that we *will* need all of that stuff (and more) for the future. We live in a growing community off a major interstate and are poised to grow. We will need the facilities to accommodate that future growth... space for Sunday school, space for gathering, space for worship, space for cars, etc. We need to have a vision for the future! That's why we are starting this much-needed project, and why we need your help with it. You and I may not be here to see the fruit of it, but someone else will! God will bless us for faithfully supporting this work just as he has blessed the people of St. Philip's in Blacksburg, Virginia. ✠

MORAL THEOLOGY: *The Four Cardinal Virtues*

Recently during the Lenten Study we examined the Three Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity. While doing so we often found ourselves talking about the four Cardinal Virtues, which are related to the theological virtues.

What are the Four Cardinal Virtues and why do they matter for the Christian? The study of human behavior and ethics from the moral and theological perspective is traditionally called moral theology. The study of the *virtues*—the four Cardinal Virtues and three Theological Virtues—was always, at least until the late 1960's, a huge part of the field of moral theology. A *virtue* may be thought of as a good habit: a stable and not easily alterable way of being. A *cardinal* virtue is a basic, and primary virtue that all of the other virtues presuppose, or boil down to. They embody the essential conditions of *every* virtue. The western tradition has reduced these virtues to four: *prudence*, *temperance*, *justice*, and *fortitude*.

The cardinal virtues were first articulated in the ancient world by Plato and Aristotle. This is what is meant by “western tradition” above. In their books *The Republic* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, Plato and Aristotle respectively expounded on the the concept and importance of virtue for human society. Their writings were picked up and elaborated on by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, and became firmly ensconced in western theology and tradition through their teaching. It is important to remember that because Plato and Aristotle were the first people who systematically wrote on this topic, and because they happened to be ancient pagans, it does *not* follow that there is no truth to what they discovered! “All truth is God’s truth.” People who are pagan are clearly able to discern the truth in many different areas of life. What the later Medieval, Christian thinkers realized, thanks to divine revelation, was that these acquired moral virtues of prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude, have to be elevated by the divinely infused virtues of faith, hope, and charity, to be spiritually effective in people’s lives.

Let’s quickly look at the the four cardinal virtues. The cardinal virtue of *prudence* is the most basic, and chiefest of the virtues. It is the virtue that enables us to choose the best means for attaining the good life, which is what the natural moral virtues are all about. Prudence deals with practical matters and always issues forth in action. It carefully judges and weighs the means and ends of an action so as to do what is necessary to attain the good life. The cardinal virtue of *temperance* consists in the restraint and moderation of man’s natural

appetites according to the dictates of reason. Traditionally, it is concerned with the so-called “pleasures of touch” - namely, eating, drinking, and sex, which are our strongest animal desires. It doesn’t seek to take away any all pleasure, but only to regulate them in a way that is conducive to the good life. The cardinal virtue of *justice* governs our relations with other people. To be just is to render to each person his right and due. Justice is both positive and negative. In terms of the former, it consists of giving to someone his or her right, and in terms of latter it consists in not violating his or her right. Justice pertains only to people, and their must be a right that is owed another person, which right must be fully rendered for justice to be complete. The last cardinal virtue is the virtue of *fortitude*. This is virtue of courage in adversity. Specifically, it is bravery for the sake of good and the good life. Thus, a brave criminal is not exercising the virtue of fortitude!

As you have no doubt noticed by now, the end of the natural moral virtues is the *good life*. But it is important to remember that from the Christian perspective one cannot have the good life apart from his final end, which is God and salvation. Hence the need for the cardinal virtues to be elevated by the theological virtues. But by the same token, we should remember that the theological virtues build upon the cardinal virtues. It is much harder for the the Holy Spirit to work in a person’s life if he or she is lacking in the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude. It takes a *prudent* man, for example, to realize his need for salvation. One must be *just* before he can be loving, and so on.

The interplay between the cardinal and theological virtues is a perfect example of how God’s grace elevates human nature and man, who, though fallen, is made in God’s image and likeness. So we study the cardinal virtues to help us become better people and to live the good life. And through the divine grace of God the good life as we experience it here and now can flower into everlasting light and life, as God infuses us with supernatural virtues to attain our spiritual destiny in Christ forever. ☩

(Note: For a scholarly, yet accessible book on this topic read “*The Four Cardinal Virtues*” by Josef Pieper. This article was reprinted from the 2013 edition of *The Centurion*.)

## PARISH NEWS &amp; UPDATES:

**Ascension Day Service and Dinner**

Join us for a simple, said service of Holy Communion on Thursday, May 18th at 6:30 p.m. as we celebrate the glorious ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven. We will have a yummy potluck supper afterwards in the parish hall. The rector will also give an informal talk on praying the rosary as the beginning of our summer series on prayer. (See the next entry.)

**Summer Series on Prayer**

Join us May, June, and July for our new summer series on prayer. The schedule will be as follows: Thursday, May 18th (Ascension Day) — Praying the Rosary; Thursday, June 8th (Corpus Christi) — Praying the Divine Office; Thursday, July 6th (Feria) — Praying with Icons, Medals, and other sacramentals. We will meet at 6:30 p.m. for dinner (provided) followed by instruction on the topic for that day. The goal is to introduce people to the various forms of prayer and meditation that we can use in our devotional life, and teach us *how* to use/do them.

**The Vigil of Pentecost**

On Pentecost (Whitsunday), which is always fifty days after Easter, we celebrate the giving of the gift of the Holy Ghost, which we read about in Acts 2. Did you know that just like there is an Easter Vigil, so there is Vigil of Pentecost? That is how important the day of Pentecost is! The service is almost (but not quite) as elaborate as that of the Easter Vigil, with prophecies, blessing of the font, the litany, and of course Holy Communion. So, whereas it is our custom to have at least one weekday Mass, the weekday Mass for the week of May 21st will be the Vigil of Pentecost, which will be held on Saturday, May 27th at 6:30 p.m. Mark your calendars now and plan to join us! We will need volunteers to help with reading the prophecies.

**Thank You**

Thanks to everyone who made it out for our Lenten Study, extra services, and Holy Week during Lent! It was great have the participation that we did. Special thanks to our altar servers and lay readers who did such a great job at the various services. If you missed these days, be sure to make a point to get more involved next year. You will be so glad that did.

**Saint Alban's Men's Group**

The rector is trying to revive our erstwhile men's group. An e-mail has been sent out about a May trip to Hampton in Baltimore County, and the rector has some other ideas for trips and activities. If you have some ideas for the men's group and know of anyone interested in joining us, or being on our e-mail list, please let Fr. Anderson know.

**“Grace, Grit, and Thanksgiving” Prayer and Fellowship Group — Summer/Fall Schedule**

*GG&T meets the 4th Tuesday of every month unless otherwise noted.* Food and snacks are always served. This is a wonderful, informal time of sharing and spiritual growth and fellowship, and also a great way to introduce people to St. Alban's. Here is the schedule:

**6/27/23** — “How Your Spiritual Journey Brought You to St. Alban's,” on June 27, 2023 (weather permitting cookout and bonfire)

**7/25/23** — “Praising God with Musical Instruments,” on July 25, 2023, led by Stephanie Brown (weather permitting cookout and bonfire)

**8/22/23** — Collection for Tools for Schools, on August 22, 2023 (weather permitting cookout and bonfire)

**9/23/23** — “HOPE-FULL,” on September 23, 2023, led by Kristi Sjöholm-Sierchio

**10/24/23** — “The Spirituality of Aging,” on October 24, 2023, led by Father Gordon Anderson. He will explore the question of how as Christians do we grapple with the inevitable changes that occur as we pass from one stage of life to the next?

**11/28/23** — “... With Thanksgiving,” on November 28, 2023, led by DOK

**12/19/23** — Christmas Carol Sing on December 19, 2023, with Dr. Jim Anthony on piano

**Thank You For Your Support**

“The minister is ordered, from time to time, to advise the People, whilst they are still in health, to make Wills arranging for the disposal of their temporal goods, and, when of ability, to leave Bequests for religious and other charitable uses.” (BCP, p. 320) ✠