

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

My son loves technology, especially his iPhone. His knowledge of this device is deep and wide ranging... he knows how to do things on this phone — make it do things— that I had no idea it could do! (And I have had iPhones since they first came out.) If you are ever at church and having trouble with your iPhone ask my son for help because the kid is an expert. Well, I was thinking about this in relation to the Book of Common Prayer the other day. For a lot of us—even lifelong Anglicans/Episcopalians—the Prayer Book is sort of like our smart phone... it can do all of this cool stuff, and has all sorts of incredible functionality, but we don't even know it. The Prayer Book gets its name "Common Prayer" because it contains the rites and ceremonies and prayers for the whole Church... not just the clergy. That being the case, it has prayers for just about every occasion we can imagine. There are prayers and thanksgivings beginning on page 35 for use all throughout the year: prayers for the various branches of government, weather, schools, health, travel, the military, the environment, the Church, and so much more. There is another long section of prayers beginning on page 594. In addition, we can cherry-pick prayers from the various services of the Church and use them in our own personal devotions. For example, do you know someone who just had a baby? There is no reason why the final prayer on page 306 from the office "The Churching of Women" can't be said by you on her behalf! The same goes with the various prayers for the dying and dead found in the offices of "The Visitation of the Sick" and the "Burial Office." There is no need to read the entire office. Indeed some parts of these and other offices are reserved for the clergy alone to read. But there is nothing stopping people from pulling from them a prayer here and there and using them in our own personal devotions. These prayers may be added to the Daily Offices if you pray them. (e.g. See the third rubric on page 17.) Or they may be said on their own whenever you feel the need to pray for something. The Litany (or General Supplication) beginning on page 54 and the Penitential Office (page 60) may also be read on your own for your devotional time. Making use of all of these other prayers from time to time is a great way not only to deepen your personal devotion, it is also a way to keep your private devotional time fresh and interesting. If reading the Daily Offices has become rote to you, then mix in some other prayers from the Prayer Book, and use different canticles sometimes. Those sorts of things go a long way in terms of preventing our devotion from becoming empty and boring. It's your Prayer Book, folks. Use it! Make the most out of it. Suck the marrow out of it, discover all of its treasures, and be richly rewarded in your spiritual life. Remember that if you need assistance with it (or need a Prayer Book) you need only contact me for help

Faithfully, your priest,

J. Gordon Anderson

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Sacred Scripture, p. 2

The Creation Narratives

Theology, p. 3

Human Nature

Parish News, p. 4

Updates from St. Alban's

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

Feb 2nd - Purification of St. Mary the Virgin

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Feb 17th - Ash Wednesday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Feb 24th - St. Matthias

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.

Feb 26th - Ember Friday in Lent

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Feb 27th - Ember Saturday in Lent

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Mar 25th - Annunciation of the BVM

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Mar 31st - Mon, Tue, Wed before Easter

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Apr 1st - Maundy Thursday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.,
Evening Prayer at 6:30 p.m.

SACRED SCRIPTURE: *Profound Truths from the Creation Narratives*

We are now in the season of Pre-Lent. During this time, in the office of Morning Prayer, we go back to the beginning of the Bible and start reading through the book of Genesis. This book contains the stories of the creation. The plural is used because there are two narratives of the creation in Genesis found respectively in chapter one and chapter two. The main difference between them is that the second narrative gives a more detailed description of the creation of man than is found in the the first narrative. Since at least the time of Charles Darwin, who posited the theory of evolution, these stories have for the most not been taken literally. Most Christians believe in what's called "theistic evolution" which is basically a fancy way of saying that God created everything through the process of evolution. (Note: The "big bang" theory was first formulated in the early 1930's by the Rev'd Georges Lemaître, a Roman Catholic priest of the Jesuit order. Interestingly, it was initially rejected by the scientific establishment in part for being "too theistic!") Some Christians find disconcerting the notion that the creation stories may not be literal descriptions of the creation of the universe. They think that accepting them as metaphors and myths leads to the edifice of Christianity which rests upon will crumble. Once, for example, a person told the author that if Adam and Eve were not literal human beings then there is no such thing as sin and evil. He failed to realize, however, that a simple look around him (and indeed a moment of self-reflection) would very easily confirm the truth of the Christian concept that man and the world is fallen and mired in sin! Actually, the creation narratives teach us much greater truths than how light came into being, and on what day the creatures of the sea were made. They teach us in the form of ancient stories very specific things about God and man: who they are in their nature and in relation to each other. (Though they certainly do not do this exhaustively, which would be impossible anyway because of the immensity and unfathomable mystery of God.) Two philosophies that the creation narratives rule out are dualism and pantheism. Dualism is the idea that good and bad are opposing realities at war with one another. This is rejected because when God created everything he declared it to be "good." Everything that exists is fundamentally good. Evil has no being or existence. Pantheism is the idea that everything is God. But the stories teach that God existed before everything else and that he made everything, and therefore they have their own reality

and are not "part" of God. Pantheism is actually related to dualism in a way because it envisions the creation as being evil. It sees embodiment as something of a "fall" for created beings, and so, as many of the eastern religions teach, "salvation" consists of being freed from the body and ultimately absorbed in God. This, again, is directly opposed to what the stories teach... that everything made by God is good. The stories also teach us plenty about the nature and purpose of man. Most important is the fact that God created man, male and female, in his own image and likeness. "*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*" (Gen. 1:27) This puts man at the pinnacle of the creation, as not even angels are made in the very image and likeness of God. As wondrous and glorious as the other creatures are, they are not as important as humanity. With this exalted status however comes great responsibility. For the second narrative says, "*And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.*" So it is the job of humanity to take good care of God's creation, not destroy it out of our own selfish greed. Other truths found in the creation narratives that are especially relevant today is the idea that God created "man" male and female. This is directly opposed to the current "transgender" fad that is sweeping across the west like a wildfire. Transgenderism teaches the scientifically absurd notion that a person can change his or her sex into a different one that agrees with how he or she "understands" himself. Aside from very rare abnormalities, there are two sexes: male and female, and everyone, based on his or her chromosomes, is either one or the other. Yet another truth the creation stories teach is that males and females were made for one another, not males to be with males and females to be with females. As the jocular old saying goes, "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." Man was created male and female in order to "*be fruitful and multiply*" (Gen. 1:28) and whereas it takes a man and woman to create life, God had to create a man and woman. Marriage therefore is something that is rooted in the very creation of man and the universe. The family predates the nation, the Church, and is the fundamental unit of society. Contemporary efforts to redefine marriage are antithetical to biblical teaching, common sense, and science. So in the end what we find is that the creation narratives, far from being quaint fairy tales, teach a great deal of truth that is still very relevant to man and society today, and that means that these beautiful stories are quite worthy of our continued attention and reflection. ✠

THEOLOGY: *The Nature of Man According to the Bible*

Lent is one of the times of year that we have a “seasonal Collect” which is a Collect (prayer) that is read at every Mass after the Collect for the Day. We know the Lenten Collect quite well: *“ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* This prayer comes from the Ash Wednesday service, as Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, and is read daily until Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week.

This beautiful Collect affirms an important truth about man that is proclaimed in sacred scripture, namely, that he is fallen —mired in sin and wickedness — and thus is in need of a new heart in order to find eternal life. His condition is best compared to that of a car with a dead engine. The car cannot function —it cannot fulfill its destiny— unless it has an engine that runs and makes it go. The same is true with our hearts on a spiritual level. To the ancient Hebrew, the heart was the center of a person. It was the seat of his will and his passions... his thoughts and intentions. (The Hebrews did not have a word for “brain.”) In the Collect we ask God to *“Create and make in us new and contrite hearts.”* This echoes Psalm 51:10 where King David writes, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”* In Genesis 8:21 God says of humanity, *“The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.”* This means that he is in need of a new, changed heart —a purified heart— so that he can live according to God's will and frame his life after that of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because the Israelites had hardened, spiritually dead hearts (e.g. Isaiah 6:10, Jeremiah 16:12), they were constantly falling into sin, and rebelling against God. This eventually led to their exile from the Promised Land. So, looking to the future —and ultimately to the advent of Christ— the prophet Ezekiel wrote, *“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”* (36:26) And the prophet Jeremiah wrote, *“And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.”* (24:7) In other words, God would one day do a great work in their lives and give them a spiritual “heart transplant” as it were so they would live their lives in fidelity to the covenant. But it is not just the Israelites

who needed new hearts so they could do God's will and be saved. All people need new spiritual hearts, because we have this disease coursing through our spiritual veins called sin. And that is why Jesus came. He is *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* (John 1:29) Saint Paul tells us further, *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”* (2 Cor. 5:17)

This is something of a process however. Those of us who have been born again by grace through faith in Jesus Christ do not instantly become free from sin. Rather, by the grace of God administered to us especially in the sacraments, we are slowly sanctified (being made holy) by the power of almighty God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We might compare it to a medical treatment where the patient begins a regimen of medicine that has to build up in his system before it begins to offer relief and really fight the disease. After baptism, wherein we die and rise with Christ, and are united with him by God's grace, the spiritual medicine whereby God transforms our hearts is the Body and Blood of his Son, our savior Jesus Christ, in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. This antidote to the poison of sin slowly works through our spiritual arteries and veins creating within us a new spiritual heart that is singularly devoted to God in Christ.

In contrast to the biblical view of man is the progressive view of man. This view sees human nature in an entirely positive perspective. It sees man as, of his own devices, capable of progressing to a bright future. So invariably he devises utopian schemes to bring about “heaven on earth.” Socialism immediately comes to mind. As one author once put it, “All utopian ideologies presuppose that human nature is fundamentally good and simple: evil and apparent complexity result from a corrupt social order. Eliminate want and you eliminate crime.” While there is much that is positive about with human nature —we are, after all, made in the image and likeness of God— we cannot ignore that we have become corrupted by sin. And no secular system dreamed up by humanity can cure us of the corrupting spiritual rot within us. Witness the fact that supposedly classless societies still always end up having an elite, privileged upper class and a poor (*very* poor) lower, serf class that is oppressed by the former. Man could invent the best social and political system ever, yet still, by itself, it would fail to bring about the salvation of the human race. The reason is because man needs to be born again! He needs a new heart, which only God can give. ☩

PARISH NEWS & UPDATES:

Monthly Requiem Mass

Each month we offer a general Requiem Mass. This is a service of holy Communion celebrated on behalf of the blessed dead. (“Requiem” is the Latin word for “rest” as in the Introit for the Mass: “Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.”) The Mass is celebrated primarily for all of the people who have been buried out of our parish, but also for friends, family, and other loved ones whose names have been added to our parish “Chantry List.” At every monthly Requiem Mass each of the names on the list is read aloud during the Mass Intentions. We often think that once a person has died there is no more that we can do for them. But that is wrong. All believers are alive in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose mystical Body, the Church, transcends space and time. So we can pray for our blessed dead, even as they most are surely praying for us. One might ask, “Why would the dead need prayers? Aren’t they in heaven? Isn’t that a place where you need no prayer?” The answer to those (good) questions is that in heaven, and in the new heavens and new earth in the resurrection, we will still be human beings, limited in knowledge. God, who is infinite, will always be mysterious to us, and so there will always be more and more to learn about him, and to grow in love for him and service to him. Several of the prayers for the dead in the Book of Common Prayer convey this idea, such as the prayer *For an Anniversary of One Departed* on page 598 which reads in part, “...we pray thee, that, having opened to him the gates of larger life, thou wilt receive him more and more into thy joyful service...” In heaven we will still have much to learn, and explore. There will be endless wonder and awe as we bask in the presence of the living God unimpeded by sin! That is what we pray for our departed brothers and sisters in Christ. So praying for the dead is a very appropriate (and also ancient) Christian practice. Come join us once a month as we offer the Holy Eucharist for our dearly departed brethren.

Monthly Healing Mass

We also offer our monthly “healing” Mass. This is a service of Holy Communion followed by Unction (anointing with oil). We celebrate the Mass appointed for the day in a slightly abbreviated form, with a brief homily or meditation on the saint or festival. This is a great way to learn about these people or festivals. After the Mass people are invited to come forward and be anointed with oil for healing. It is not necessary to be

“sick” to attend this Mass. Coming forward for unction is entirely optional. Please come and join us for this service sometime!

Rector’s Forum

Don’t forget that we have a “Rector’s Forum” every Sunday from 8:50 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. This is a great time to meet people from another service while enjoying light treats, and coffee and tea. We always have a discussion about the saint whose day falls on the Sunday or during the week, where we are in the church year and associated customs, the propers (Scripture passages) and other topics. It is not a “lecture” by the rector, but rather a laid back discussion and sharing time that moves organically. It’s actually a lot of fun! Each Sunday is a self-contained unit, so you can come as frequently or infrequently as you like. And there is plenty room to social distance in our comfortable and expansive parish hall. So whichever service you attend, please come on out one Sunday and sit in on the forum!

2021 Lenten Study

Our Lenten study will begin on Tuesday, February 23rd. We will read Evening Prayer at 7:00 p.m. and then have our study and finish by 8:00 p.m. The topic is “The Music and Hymnody of the Church.” We will be studying the musical tradition of the Church, with special emphasis on the Anglican tradition. We will study the 1940 Hymnal, and learn what all of the strange notation and various appendices are and mean, and we will hear beautiful examples of various types of church music thanks to the wonders of modern technology! (iPhone and bluetooth speaker) You do not have to be a musician to enjoy this study and be edified by some of the greatest music in the history of the world! Please be sure to join us.

Standing Notices

“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) ✠