

# The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

As I write this cities and municipalities around our country burn with anger and riots. What began as legitimate protests over a tragic instance of police brutality was quickly hijacked by sociopathic hooligans. The sincere voices of all people of goodwill have been drowned out by maniacs from across the political spectrum. These ramble-rousers seem intent on spreading social unrest and violence in an effort to destroy our great nation, which, despite its faults, is the freest, greatest, and most prosperous nation in the history of the human race. And, for now anyway, America burns, both literally and figuratively. It has been very interesting (*not* in a good way, mind you) to read some of the reactions to this madness on social media. The most astonishing notion one encounters is this idea that it is somehow okay for a person or people to wantonly destroy another's property because of an altercation that happened between two *other* people! It's like saying: Fred gets beat up by John and left to die, so Sammy burns down Andy's store. There is absolutely nothing in the least bit rational about that! But astonishingly, for the average person today, who lives online and consumes a steady diet of mass media, such violence is completely justified. Why? Because we have been slowly conditioned to think of life in terms of socialist and postmodern neo-Marxist categories. And in that philosophy there is no such thing as an individual. "You" are not a free, self-determining individual. In fact there is no "you" but just a large, faceless mass. This is what lay at the root of our contemporary so-called "identity politics." (Its most extreme expression is found in the communist dictatorship of North Korea.) So the angry mob sees it as completely legitimate to destroy local businesses even though it may have had nothing to do with the particular crime that has rightly or wrongly outraged them. To them, the business and its owners are not individual "persons" but instead cogs in a *system* that oppresses the poor. (This is the other notable hallmark of Marxism: "class warfare.") In stark contrast to this collectivism is the biblical notion that each person is unique and has his own soul and personality given him directly by God. (Psalm 139). The Bible also rejects the notion that one person can be held accountable for another person's sin, and instead affirms that each person is responsible for his own actions. (Ezekiel 18:20) The violence we see unfolding before our eyes is the result of the godlessness that has been enveloping our society and slowly warping our minds since the radical days of the late 1960's. More than ever before, Christians must be prophetic witnesses for the truth. We need to think in Christian terms, and view life from a Biblical, Christian point of view in order to turn back the wickedness of the age, whether it be murder committed by rogue police or stores and cars being torched. In short, we ourselves must be *converted* and live lives that befit the people of God. Only *that* will begin to change society for the better.

Faithfully, your priest, *J. Gordon Anderson*

June 2020

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UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

**Jun 1st-2nd - Monday & Tuesday in Whitsun Week**

Holy Communion at 3:00 p.m.

**Jun 11th - Corpus Christi**

Holy Communion at 3:00 p.m.

**Jun 12th - St. Barnabas**

Holy Communion at 3:00 p.m.

**Jun 24th - St. John Baptist**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Jun 29th - St. Peter**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Jul 2nd - Visitation BVM**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Jul 4th - Independence Day**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Jul 25th - St. James**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Aug 6th - Transfiguration**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Aug 15th - Assumption**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Aug 24th - St. Bartholmew**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

MORAL THEOLOGY: *Thoughts on the Virtue of Justice and Human Existence*

We hear so much today about “justice” mostly with the modifier “social” before it. We also hear phrases like “environmental justice” and “health justice” and almost anything else of which one could think. People in the media routinely speak of how something “unjust” has happened, or how there is “injustice” in society. It seems like everyone is talking about justice these days! But what is justice? Where does it come from and what does it even mean? With all of this talk of justice that we constantly hear we would do well to learn more about it, and especially what the Church has always taught about it.

As Christians, it is the Church’s reflection on justice that should be what guides us in how we think about it. Obviously we should understand at the outset that the Church did not invent the concept of justice. People in the Greco-Roman world had been reflecting on it for centuries before Christianity came along. Its roots are to be found in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Christians simply adopted their categories because they found in them something true according to reason and “common grace”, and then further expounded upon them in light of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

In Christian thought “justice” is seen as one of the Four Cardinal Virtues. A “virtue” may be defined as a good habit. It is an action... something that one does, or practices. It is understood as a “cardinal” virtue because it is a root/foundational virtue from which flow other virtues. Justice is the virtue which governs our behavior towards other people. It is generally defined as “*a steady unchanging will to render to each other his right.*” (Mortimer, “Elements of Moral Theology” p. 185) This basic and simple definition is actually highly nuanced and needs to be unpacked a bit.

First, justice has to do with our relationship with other people. “There has to be a person whose right is respected.” (ibid) The key word here is “person.” So, to speak of things like “environmental” or “health” justice is non-sensical. It is impossible for an inanimate object, or a policy proposal, or a concept, to be treated unjustly, because such things, being objects, and/or a conceptual constructs, have no personality or rationality, and therefore simply do not have “rights” that are owed to them by human beings.

Second, “there must be a right, something strictly owed and due.” (ibid) So in other words if one person says to another, “You are treating me unjustly,” then it is incumbent upon him to demonstrate that the

accused actually owes him something, such as if he was given a bad check by the other in payment for a product or service. It is not “just” for a person to demand of someone something that is not due him, still less to take it by force as has sometimes happened in communist countries when businesses are forcefully “nationalized.”

Third, if there is an injustice committed by one person against another, the virtue of justice demands that it be paid in full... not “in full plus some extra for pain and suffering.” This is why Lady Justice is always pictured in art holding scales. When the scales are balanced there is justice. Tilting the scales in an opposite direction in an attempt to redress supposed wrongs is not “justice” but rather “charity.” (“Balance” by the way is the key idea in moral theology. A “virtue” is always seen as the *mean* between two vices... a vice of defect and a vice of excess.)

Justice therefore, in the traditional understanding of the Church deals with external things and actions, not ambiguities like ideas and feelings, which are completely subjective. It is to give to others their due, or their right. But what is the “right” of people? And why do people have rights to begin with?

A person has natural rights because he is a “rational, individual self-existent being.” (Mortimer, p. 187) He does not exist for other people, but for himself. He is an end in himself, not a means to an end. Most important, he is made in the image and likeness of God and is unique in God’s eyes. Because of this he has rights. The British philosopher, John Locke, famously said that man has the right to “life, liberty, and property.” (We Americans add to that “the pursuit of happiness,” which is sort of already entailed in Locke’s definition.) No one may deprive another person of his God-given natural right of self-determination. All people should respect one another as folk that are equal to us.

We see many examples of true injustice today. The killing of George Floyd comes immediately to mind. Sadly, because we live in a fallen, and man has a sinful nature, there will always be instances of people treating others unjustly. We cautiously, and with God’s help, try to create a more just society beginning with how we live our own lives and comport ourselves one to another. The prophet Micah gives us guidance: “*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*” (6:8)

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But there is an old saying that goes, “Charity begins at home.” The truth of the matter is that a lot of things begin “at home”... in our own hearts and lives, and our own hearts. One of those things is the virtue of justice. How do *we* treat *our* neighbor? Do we love him or her as God loves them? The second great commandment, as we hear at every service of Holy Communion, is “to love our neighbor as ourself.” Is that what we try to do? These are rhetorical questions of course. But they give us something serious to think about and raise a larger point. Namely, that it is up to us as *individuals* to be just and practice justice in our own lives and interactions with others. Only then will *society*, which is the sum total of individuals, become more just.

Contrary to some political pundits, the *primary* problem with the world (and especially America) is not “structural” sin, or “structural” violence, or “structural” racism but rather the sinful people behind them. Whatever evil and injustice there is in the world is due to the fact that the world is populated by sinful people who have a proclivity to mischief and evil rather than to good. Structures merely reflect the moral priorities of the people who make them. Sinful, unconverted people, often make sinful structures. When people change, then structures change... for good, or ill. We can demand that sinful structures be changed all we want, but if the individual people behind them do not change, then we are fighting an uphill battle and we are not likely to see much change.

However, to contemporary folk, the idea that there is something wrong with us as individual people that needs to be fixed is completely absurd and utterly repugnant. It runs counter to the Enlightenment notion that through knowledge and natural science, and *without* God, we can progress from a primitive state of superstition and violence to one of peace, equity, and prosperity. The effects of the Enlightenment have rippled on throughout human history leading us to where we are today. So today we pride ourselves on being “progressive.” The root word there is “progress.” Humanity “progresses” slowly but surely to a type of social and political nirvana.

The notion of human sinfulness also runs counter to our therapeutic culture of affirmation and self-actualization. We are told that we can be whoever and whatever we want to be. Children win trophies in sports even if they are terrible flops at the game. We are told that nothing is impossible, and that “if we wish upon a star that our dreams will come true.” But then,

when cold hard reality smacks us in the face, and we are taken aback and shocked, we have the reaction that the “system” or “the man” has done this to them. Others blame their environment. Rarely do they consider that they themselves, of their own free will, made bad decisions and are suffering as a result of that. All of this leads to the “victim mentality” that pervades our culture. Because it is absolutely out of the question that we could possibly mess up and fall short in some way it must have been some *other* (evil) person—or some nebulous “system”—that did this to us.

This, incidentally, is what one saw in the old “American Idol” auditions. Singer after mediocre (or just plain bad) singer pranced into the room, thinking they were the next Diana Ross or Frank Sinatra, only to be told that they were awful. (Simon Cowell once famously told a young man that he was the worst singer on earth.) Oh how their faces would crash! Others would become enraged and argue before storming (or being escorted) out. In almost every case the rejected singers said that the *judges* were wrong, and stupid, and that they just didn’t know a good voice when they heard one. Rarely would a contestant even *entertain* the possibility that perhaps the judges were 100% right. Why? Because our therapeutic culture and upbringing teaches us to say, “It’s someone else’s fault.”

If we want greater justice in the world, then the best place to start is by being just ourselves. The more we practice the virtue of justice in our own lives, the more just society will become. And the more people who try to practice the virtue of justice, the more justice society will become. But for that to happen there has to be *conversion* of heart, beginning with ourselves! Then we need to go out and into the world and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and invite others to convert and follow him... to turn from their sin and wickedness and live. Until hearts change for the better (something only God can do), society will not change for the better.

That is not to say there is no room for greater, lawful action on a local and national level. Far from it! That needs to be done too. And God has raised up many men and women over the years who have prophetically challenged the unjust status quo, such as Christians like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Abp. Oscar Romero, and Bp. Trevor Huddleston, to name just a few. Here in America we have a free and wonderful political process to effect lasting and positive change peacefully of which we need to make better use at times. But let us look at ourselves, and our own hearts, and see what changes need to be made there first. ☩

SEMINARIAN UPDATE: *Monthly Update from the Rev'd Mason Waldhauser*

Dear Friends,

I am writing to you as an alumnus now, at the conclusion of an anticlimactic senior year of seminary. I turned in my last final without any fanfare, and eased into the summer and life post seminary. It has been such a blessing to live life in a place as wonderful as Nashotah House, with the kind of friends who I expect to be lifelong and with the kind of professors I have learned so much from. Partly because of Covid stuff, but partly also because of sentimentality, I chose to stay on campus the last few weeks and take my time in moving out.

Today, though, I left campus in a cargo van with my mom, who was very helpful in the packing up, to begin a road trip to Denver to move my things into the parish house where I'll be living during my curacy. Although work won't officially begin until September, I'll be at St. Mary's sporadically this summer; and I preach this Sunday. Monday begins my thirty-day retreat out here, which will be an awesome chance to process the last three years of seminary and my transition into ministry. In August I'll have my final set of interviews before priestly ordination, which hopefully will be this fall, before I road trip back out to Denver, with a pit stop in Wisconsin for my graduation ceremony September 24.

I have been thinking a lot about grace lately and how it works and had the chance to write about it for my final paper for Systematics and to preach on it the following Sunday. I have been struck in my reading by three points which I thought I'd share with you before I sign off.

- 1) Grace is light to the intellect. God gets the ball rolling in our moral lives first by helping us to see what is actually good.
- 2) Grace is strength to the will. Seeing what is good, God heals our wills, making them healthy enough to desire what the intellect shows it to be good.
- 3) By this process, rather than controlling our wills by force, God coaxes and solicits our wills by grace, helping us to see the desirability of virtuous action and freeing us to choose it of our own free will. God's grace makes us know the good and be able to love it, in such a way that we would pursue it freely, without constraint.

I found it encouraging to realize that God wants us not only to do the right thing, but to do it freely; and by enlightening our intellects and strengthening our wills, by grace, God teaches us to live well in a way that it is both by his assistance and by our own agency.

This is my prayer for you all. Thank you for your prayers for me. I would appreciate them especially for these thirty days ahead of me. I look forward to filling you in on the other side of it and seeing you later in the summer.

Best, *Deacon Mason*

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POSTSCRIPT:

I want to thank each and every one of you for your faithfulness and prayers and support during these most trying times! We are not out of the woods yet, but we do (knock on wood) appear to be heading towards a clearing. Let us keep our eyes upon it. Thank you for your patience with me as I was thrust into homeschooling (the bulk of which fell upon me) with absolutely zero notice. I learned a lot about myself these past few months, most especially how I need to trust in God for all things and commit my life daily to him, and putting him first every moment of my day. Some might wonder what I did when not homeschooling. Well, I did much of my usual church work —prepared sermons, wrote the newsletter, called people, had meetings (remotely, until recently), set up online payment stuff, etc.— at least I did what I could do from the dining room table! My spiritual life was nurtured by daily prayer from the Divine Office

(Morning and Evening Prayer). It was a real lifeline to me. If you don't read the Daily Offices get into the habit of doing it! You will be mightily repaid. I got a lot of good reading done, mostly theology, but also some periodicals. We bought an awesome fire pit called a "Solo Stove" and had lots of fun outside. If you are in the market this is the one to buy. It is "scientifically" designed to smoke less but burn with a gigantic flame! Very highly recommended and worth the cost. We watched a couple of good movies and documentaries on TV. I cooked a lot. Right at the very beginning we cooked a massive turkey that had been frozen since November and ate for a week! The garage got completely organized... but not cleaned out. I played tons of guitar and finally made lots of progress on a sonata by Scarlatti, a Bach lute prelude, and some early Spanish Baroque pieces. So, that's a brief snapshot of my life. Thanks for your prayers and support! I hope your "Coronatide" was/is as profitable as mine. ☩