

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

As we are in the midst of Lent this edition of *The Centurion* contains two articles relative to self-examination: an article on the so-called “Seven Deadly Sins” and an article on the “Decalogue” or “Ten Commandments.” Why these articles? Because these “lists” are traditionally used in the process of self-examination before private confession and at other times during the year. As we all know, Lent is one time of year when many people customarily make a private confession of sin to a priest. If you’ve never used this sacrament, and wondered how to prepare for it, one of the ways is to spend time in self-examination using these lists as guides to help us see where we have fallen short and need to improve in our lives with God’s help. Of course, the whole Christian life ought to be one of self-examination. We should make a daily self-examination, perhaps before going to bed at night, and then pray and ask God to forgive us where we’ve fallen short and help us do better in the future. We can also use these lists as guides before receiving Holy Communion. The little booklet about preparing for Holy Communion that we have available for free on the literature table in the parish hall indeed uses these lists to lead us in the process of self-examination. Switching gears, you have all no doubt noticed the new flooring in the sanctuary in the church. The old, worn out red carpeting has been replaced with a stunning solid oak floor which is much more suitable for the space, as it cannot be burned by incense, and spills and other messes that occasionally occur, and can be easily cleaned. It just looks a lot nicer too. The excessive amount of red in the church (red wall-to-wall carpeting, red pew cushions, red hymnals and prayer books, the red reredos behind the altar (did I miss anything?) was too much to bear. Red can be a very overpowering color and must be used wisely. Many a pretty church has been aesthetically ruined with wall-to-wall red carpeting. So this new floor looks good and is better suited for that part of the church. We also repaired the deteriorating sub-flooring and fixed a “repair” job that was done in the early 1990’s in completely the wrong way and was causing us problems. We were able to pay for this thanks to a bequest from the late Marcia Smithson. Thanks be to God for her generosity to the church, and please... *remember the church in your estate planning!* That being said, we are taking donations to offset the cost of the installation which was around \$5,000, and so we do not have to eat too much into her generous gift. So if you’d like to donate something towards this beautiful addition to the church you can drop a check in the offering plate with “floor” listed in the memo. I wish all of you a blessed and Holy Lent. May God give you grace as you daily walk with him and seek his face in prayer, sacrament, scripture, and service to others!

Faithfully, your priest,

J. Gordon Anderson

March 2020

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UPCOMING SERVICES:

Mar 4th - Ember Wednesday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Mar 6th - Ember Friday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Mar 7th - Ember Saturday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Mar 25th - Annunciation

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Apr 5th-11th - Holy Week

Services to be announced

Apr 25th - St. Mark

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 1st - Ss. Philip & James

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 18th-20th - Rogation Days

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

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

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 11th - St. Barnabas

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

THEOLOGY: *The Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Godly Virtues*

As we are in the midst of Lent this is as good a time as any to look at the so-called “Seven Deadly Sins” and their counterparts the “Seven Godly Virtues.” The former are: pride, anger, covetousness, lust, envy, sloth, and gluttony. The latter are: humility, forgiveness, generosity, purity, love, diligence, and temperance. As one author points out, whereas *all* sin is deadly it is perhaps better to refer to the Seven “Deadly” Sins as the Seven “Capital” Sins. This is because they are “root forms of sin whence spring all its manifestations, either deadly or venial.” (*Elements of the Spiritual Life*, F.P. Harton, p. 138) Just as there are more virtues than just the “Four Cardinal Virtues” we call prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude “cardinal” virtues because they are “root” forms of virtue, whence all the other virtues spring.

As sinful, fallen human beings we have within us the urge to sin. This inclination to evil is called “concupiscence.” It is manifested within us in three ways. St. John, in his first Epistle (2:16) writes, “*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*” As Harton points out, this three-fold concupiscence makes the wiles and temptations of the enemies of the soul—the world, the flesh, and the devil— attractive to us. The Lust of the Flesh brings forth Gluttony, Lust, and Sloth; the Lust of the Eyes brings forth Covetousness; and the Pride of Life brings forth Pride, Envy, and Anger. (ibid)

For most people with even a little bit of intelligence and modest amount of life experience the meaning of these sins is self-evident. Gluttony is overindulging in food and other pleasures of the flesh. Lust has to do with our sexual desires. Sloth is laziness. Covetousness is being too attached to earthly things... being greedy. Pride, the first sin, is the failure to accept ourselves as we truly are, and the desire to be someone or something else. (This was the sin of Adam and Eve, and also the devil. Both wanted to be “as God,” not human, or an angel.) Envy is being dissatisfied with what we have and desiring what others have instead. It is being jealous of how God has supposedly blessed others more us. And anger is being violent, unforgiving, and impatient with others. When examining ourselves might go through the Seven Deadly Sins and think of specific instances where we have committed these sins so that we might confess them and be forgiven.

As always, the goal is to live holy lives, so we hope to, with God’s help, put away these sins as we grow in our Christian lives.

The great Anglo-Catholic devotional book *The Practice of Religion* (available for sale through the APA website) gives a helpful list for conquering the Seven Deadly Sins, creatively entitled “Ways of Conquering the Seven Deadly Sins” (p. 85) The general rule given for conquering them—and sin in general—is to “practice self-denial, self-sacrifice, detachment, and recollection of God’s presence.” The key word here is “practice.” We need to make these disciplines part of our daily lives by *practicing* them. In other words, they have to become a way of life.

The list continues with specific ways to deal with each individual deadly sin. If we look at the list of sins we see that the virtues (The Seven Godly Virtues) are the direct opposites of the Seven Deadly Sins. So, for example, we battle sloth by practicing diligence. We battle gluttony by practicing temperance. We battle pride by practicing humility, and so on, and so forth.

Often in spiritual direction, when we confess sins in these areas, we will be encouraged to cultivate the positive, godly virtues so as to make progress in our spiritual lives. It would seem, then, that one of the main ways to address sinful behavior in our lives no matter what it may be is to try to boil it down to its root and then address that root with the opposite behavior, all the while imploring God’s mercy and help.

So, by way of example, after self-examination we might find that whereas we are seething with bitterness towards another person, it is due to the fact that we are angry with them, of which behavior God obviously does not approve. (Matt. 5:21-22) And so the way out of that behavior is to practice the opposite behavior... to do works of love for the person, to be patient with him, to pray for him, and to forgive.

In sum, we should all, on a regular basis, take time out to examine ourselves and look at our lives honestly and soberly so as to discern sinful behavior—the things we have done, and left undone—and see where we have fallen short... to identify this and bring it before God to be forgiven and receive the grace to do better. Reflecting on the Seven Deadly Sins and their opposites, the Seven Godly Virtues, is a good practice in this are and a tool that we can use to do this so as to grow in holiness and find eternal salvation through Christ forever. ☩

THEOLOGY: *The Decalogue (or “Ten Commandments”)*

The other item from our tradition that is helpful to use in self-examination for private confession, or self-examination in general anytime throughout the year is the Decalogue or “Ten Commandments.” (The word “decalogue” means “book of ten.”) In the Anglican tradition in the Church of England it was customary historically to recite the Decalogue at the beginning of the service of Holy Communion. In the American Episcopal Church, in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, it was allowed for the Decalogue to be said just once a month, with the so-called “Summary of the Law”, which we are used to hearing most of the time, being said in its place. (Though we here at St. Alban’s still, according to tradition, read the Decalogue once a month at the early Sunday Mass. Bishop Grundorf allows the Decalogue to be removed entirely from the Mass.)

Once of the reasons the Decalogue was put at the beginning of the Anglican service was precisely for self-examination. The idea was that we hear God’s law and, realizing how we fall short, we say after each one, “Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep thy law.” (Basically, the early Anglican Reformers had lost sight of the fact that the “Kyrie Eleison” [“Lord, have mercy upon us.”] was originally, in the ancient church, celebratory, and a form of acclamation, *not* a penitential confession! But we are getting off track.) The Church of England was on to something pastorally, however, with this notion of using the Decalogue for self-examination, however weirdly they tried to add it to the liturgy. What *we* can do personally with the Decalogue is prayerfully run through it in our minds in times of self-examination to see how we have fallen short and need to make improvements in our lives. Now, once might protest that there are few “murderers” or “adulterers” or “idolators” and the like in church, and so, what would be the point of using these for self-examination? But it has always been the position of the tradition that these commandments are not only specific but also very broad. In other words, murder is much more than ending another’s life. Jesus’ words from Matthew 5:21-22 once again come to mind.

The Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer is very helpful in expanding our understanding of the meaning of the Ten Commandments. It notes that we learn two things from them: our duty towards God, and our duty towards our neighbor. The first half, commandments 1-4, deal with our duty towards God, the second half, 5-10, with our duty towards neighbor.

If we carefully study them in self-examination we will see how we fall short in our duty towards both.

The Prayer Book explains the deeper meaning of the first four commandments. Our duty towards God is: (1 & 2) “*To worship him, to give him thanks: To put my whole trust in him, to call upon him;* (3) *To honor his holy Name and his Word:* (4) *And to serve him truly all the days of my life.*” (BCP p. 288) So if we study the Decalogue with this lens we can see various ways that we have fallen short of our duty towards God, and for which we should repent. Have we truly served him? Have we honored his Name and Word? Have we put our whole trust in him? And etc. The second half of the commandments explain our duty towards our neighbor. That duty is: (5) “*To love, honour, and help my father and mother: To honour and obey the civil authority: To submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters: And to order myself in that lowliness and reverence which becometh a servant of God:* (6) *To hurt nobody by word or deed: To bear no malice nor hatred in my heart:* (7) *To keep my body in temperance, soberness, and chastity:* (8) *To keep my hands from picking and stealing: To be true and just in all my dealings:* (9) *To keep my tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slandering:* (10) *Not to covet nor desire other men’s goods; But to learn and labour truly to earn mine own living. And to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me.*” (BCP pp. 288-289) This particular exposition of the meaning of the second half of the Decalogue is both especially simple and brilliant.

If we meditate upon the commandments through these deeper explanations we will find in them rich fruit for our own personal self-examination. For example, the 5th commandment, “Honor thy father and mother,” has so much more to do with honoring our parents. It is about honoring *all* of those in authority over us: our elected officials, teachers, pastors, employers, and so on, and ultimately to comport ourselves to all people as humble servants of God. Wow! That gives us a lot to think about.

So, in sum, the Ten Commandments are for us a great framework for spiritual self-examination. Whenever we desire to look at our lives and assess ourselves honestly before God in terms of our everyday behavior we may, in addition to looking at the Seven Deadly Sins, look at the Ten Commandments for a standard by which to compare our actions. Together they are a great way to prepare ourselves for Holy Communion, private confession, or just the daily *sturm und drang* of everyday spiritual life as the followers of Jesus Christ. ☩

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

Dear Friends,

We have just hit a warm spell up here in Wisconsin, believe it or not, and I'm writing you from the patio of our library, because this 40° weather feels like summer compared to what it's been like recently. I'll take this opportunity first to fill you in on what I'm learning academically, then on what things have been like here socially.

In Systematic Theology, we've been talking about salvation and how John Henry Newman offered a middle way between Roman and Protestant views on justification. Whereas the Protestants taught that the righteousness of God was "imputed" to the soul externally, and our righteousness is completely alien to us, and based on how God sees us in Christ, the Roman Catholics taught that the righteousness of God is "infused," or takes root in the soul and gets expressed in our actions. Newman took both of these views and synthesized them by saying that the righteousness of God is "imparted" to the soul, and that righteousness is actually Jesus Christ himself, present to the soul by the Holy Spirit. So the Spirit within us is both the basis for our justification before God and the source of our growth in becoming righteous people. This was a helpful realization to me to discover that salvation really isn't some abstract process but is the spiritual union of Christ with the soul, and is therefore entirely relational.

And speaking of relationships, it feels like we've been very busy lately as a community. In the days preceding Lent, we got two big parties out of the way before the fast. The first was the chili cookoff, which had a lot of participants. At pub night, somebody made crawfish, which was the first time I'd ever tried them. For some reason, even though there's nothing gross to me about picking crabs, I was really weirded out by the crawfish. And there was a dance class that another one of the students in the Continuum taught, and he walked us through a couple different dances. I didn't expect to learn swing during my time in seminary.

But the biggest event we had was on Shrove Tuesday. We had the pancake races like we did last year, where you're running with a pancake in a pan and have to flip it halfway through the run. And that night was skit night. That was definitely a highlight my junior year, but last night,

nobody put it on; so this year, my classmate Matt, and I decided to put it together and MC the event.

All the faculty and students and families and a couple off-campus friends all turned out for that, and Matt and I got up on stage and realized that we had more people present that we ever have at Mass. I think we had eight skits from our classmates, and one from a professor, who played guitar for his. I guess it was more of a variety show than a series of skits, now that I think about it. Our organist read an article he found from the music director in the 1920s, who complained about how bad the music program was, and his critiques felt surprisingly relevant. He said that if he died, he wouldn't want his requiem to be sung here. There were some faculty impersonations. I gave out some awards, like "Most likely to leave for Rome" and "Most likely to become a bishop," and as prizes, I found the strangest titles from our free book section on the givaway shelf in the library. My favorite was "The Crooked Shall be made Straight: A Young Girl's Journey with Scoliosis." And I did a little standup to end the thing, and it was really easy because of all the inside jokes there are and how well you get to know everyone here at the seminary.

Later today, I have two papers to work on. Things are busy, and if you would be willing to pray for me, I would appreciate your intercession particularly for organization, focus, and energy for completing life stuff. Just emails and phone calls and an oil change and that sort of thing. Lent is a good time for me to keep learning to simplify and to spend my free time well instead of letting these things pile up.

I hope you've had a blessed start to the season and grow closer with our Lord as you seek to imitate his life of self-denial. Thank you for your prayers.

Best,
Dcn. Mason

Mason is a student at Nasbotah House, an historic seminary of the Episcopal Church. Today, like most seminaries, Nasbotah educates students from many different Anglican and other Christian traditions. ☩