

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

The month of May is known for many important things, such as the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, and the birthdays of Bob Hope, John F. Kennedy, and yours truly. But here in America we have a special tradition in May: Mother's Day. While Mother's Day is not a liturgical feast it is interesting to note that it originated in a Methodist Church in West Virginia in the early 20th century. The founder of the holiday, Ann Reeves Jarvis, believed it was important to have a special national day in honor of mothers because a mother is *"the person who has done more for you than anyone in the world."* Indeed we love and honor our mothers. Why? Because they have done everything for us. They brought us into the world, they nurture us, feed us, they clean us, comfort us, discipline us, teach us, and on and on. Well we Christians have another mother in addition to our natural, earthly mothers: Holy Mother Church. The Church is our "mother" in the sense that she gives spiritual birth to us, teaches us, provides for us comforts us, disciplines us, loves us, and so on. Everything we know about God the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—has been taught to us by the Church in her Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition. What sorts of things does she teach us? She tells us who God is: he is the creator of heaven and earth. She tells us what he has done: he became flesh and dwelt among us. She teaches us that he loves us and gave his life for our salvation. She tells us how to live: to form our lives according to the Ten Commandments, the Seven Godly Virtues, the Three Theological Virtues, and Four Cardinal Virtues. She teaches us how to pray: the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, and all of the other treasures of prayer the saints have produced. Holy Mother Church births us in the waters of baptism, and feeds us with the Body and Blood Christ. She forgives us of our sins in the name of Christ in the sacrament of penance. In short, all grace is mediated to us through our dear Holy Mother, the Church. And so we ought to love her and honor her. There is no such thing as a "solitary" Christian... a "just me and Jesus" Christian. Rather, we are all part of a family, which is the Body of Christ—the Church—and we are all members one of another (Romans 12:5). Whenever we have questions in life about who we are, where we are going, what's going on in the world and how we should react to it and think about it, as Christians we should always consult our Holy Mother Church, because she is filled with the Holy Ghost who, according to the promise of Christ, will guide her into all truth. (John 16:13) The most basic deposit of faith the Church has to teach us about God and Christ, man and the world, and everything else, is the Holy Bible. After that we have the great Holy Tradition of the Church which unpacks and expounds upon the great truths of scripture, all in order to lead us to eternal salvation. So this month, as we celebrate mothers, let us give thanks for our Holy Mother Church.

Faithfully, your priest, *J. Gordon Anderson*

May 2021

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UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

May 1st - Ss Philip & James

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 10th, 11th, 12th - Rogation Days

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 13th - Ascension Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 24th, 25th - Monday & Tuesday in Whitsun Week

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 26th, 28th, 29th - Ember Wednesday-Saturday in Whitsun Week

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

June 11th - St. Barnabas

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

June 24th - Nativity of St. John Baptist

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

June 29th - Ss. Peter & Paul

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

July 2 - Visitation of BVM

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

THEOLOGY: *Who is the Holy Spirit?*

This month on Sunday, May 23rd we celebrate the feast of Pentecost, otherwise known in our Anglican tradition as Whitsunday. Pentecost occurs fifty days after Easter (hence the name). Originally Pentecost was an Old Testament feast of the Hebrew people. It occurred fifty days after the Passover and commemorated the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. In the New Testament, in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter two, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem, filling them with power so they could fulfill the Great Commission given to them by our Lord Jesus Christ.

So who is the Holy Spirit? The first thing we notice in that question, as well as in the subheading of the article, is the word “who.” That means the Holy Spirit is not a thing but a person. This agrees with Jesus in John 16:5 ff. “When **he**, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.” The Holy Spirit (or “Ghost”, which comes from the German word “geist”, which means spirit) is the third person (not “part”) of the Holy Trinity. He is “God the Spirit.” St. Augustine of Hippo refers to him as the “love” of God... specifically the love shared between the Father and the Son. The Holy Ghost is not an “it” or a “thing” like “the force” in the Star Wars movies.

We first read of the Holy Spirit in the book of Genesis 1:2 at the creation where it says, “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” As the Old Testament continues we see the Holy Spirit in other places and situations. In the historical books we see examples of the Holy Spirit coming upon people whom God has chosen to do certain tasks including Joshua (Nu. 27:18), Gideon (Judg. 6:34), Samson (Judg. 13:25; 14:6), and Saul (1 Sam. 10:9-10). In the book of the prophet Isaiah we read of Holy Spirit as well. In 11:1-5 there is a prophecy that speaks of the Holy Ghost which is read in the confirmation service —the famous “Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit” to be exact.

When the New Testament begins the first place we see the Holy Spirit is at the baptism of our Lord. He is found in each Gospel account of Jesus’ baptism. (See Mt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 1:31-34) We should note also that the Holy Ghost also makes an appearance in Luke 1:80 in the life of Saint John Baptist. The most famous New Testament episode with

the Holy Spirit if of course the “Day of Pentecost” in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter two, which serves as the Epistle for Pentecost Sunday. On that day the Holy Ghost descended upon the disciples as they were gathered in an upper room, filling them and enduing them with heavenly power and gifts so they could fulfill their vocation to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, and make disciples of all nations. (Matthew 28:19-20).

In Acts chapter two we read that the Holy Ghost appeared as “*cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.*” (Acts 2:3) Whereas the disciples (later called “apostles”) were the first bishops of the Church, their successors at one point began wearing a special type of hat called a “mitre” that is still to this day shaped like a flame of fire.

The indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit was not given only to the disciples however. Every Christian, by virtue of his baptism and confirmation, has the Holy Spirit —the third person of the Holy Trinity— dwelling within him. In the sacrament of Holy Baptism the priest prays the following prayer: “*Give thy Holy Spirit to this child, that he may be born again, and be made an heir of everlasting salvation.*” (BCP p. 276) And then in the sacrament of Holy Confirmation the bishop prays the following prayer over the confirmands: “*Almighty and everliving God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants by Water and the Holy Ghost, and hast given unto them forgiveness of all their sins; Strengthen them, we beseech thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, and daily increase in them thy manifold gifts of grace: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness; and fill them, O Lord, with the spirit of thy holy fear, now and for ever.*” (This is the prayer for the so-called “Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit” mentioned above.)

It is amazing to consider that we have the same exact Holy Spirit indwelling us that the disciples had in them beginning on the day of Pentecost! Of course, he manifests himself in people’s lives in totally different ways (i.e. the “gifts of the Spirit” that St. Paul writes about in a few places), but if we are Christians we can be sure that he is there within us, even if we do not speak in miraculous tongues like the disciples did in Acts chapter two.

More important, it is very comforting to know that God the Holy Spirit is with us wherever we go. We can never be separated from him or his all powerful love. He literally indwells we his children, and for that we give thanks. ✠

ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR: *The Rogation Days*

At the end of Eastertide and immediately before Ascensiontide is the brief three day season of Rogationtide. The Book of Common Prayer describes these days as “Days of Solemn Supplication.” (BCP p. li) To supplicate means “to ask.” That is the exact meaning of “rogare” which is the root of the word “rogation.” So Rogationtide is a season of prayer and asking. As it says in the Gospel appointed for Rogation Sunday, “*VERILY, verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*” (John 16:23 ff.) This theme of “asking” is also one of the reasons why we always sing the Litany on Rogation Sunday.

But for what specifically do we ask during Rogationtide? The answer is a good growing season. So here in the spring we ask God’s blessing upon the land so we have enough food to eat, and then in the fall on Thanksgiving Day we give God thanks for having answered our prayer with a bountiful harvest. The additional prayers appointed for Rogationtide found on pp. 39-40 in the Prayer Book capture the very essence of this season:

“ALMIGHTY God, who hast blessed the earth that it should be fruitful and bring forth whatsoever is needful for the life of man, and hast commanded us to work with quietness, and eat our own bread; Bless the labors of husbandmen, and grant such seasonable weather that we may gather in the fruits of the earth, and ever rejoice in thy goodness, to the praise of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

“O GRACIOUS Father, who openest thine hand and fillest all living things with plenteousness; We beseech thee of thine infinite goodness to hear us, who now make our prayers and supplications unto thee. Remember not our sins, but thy promises of mercy. Vouchsafe to bless the lands and multiply the harvests of the world. Let thy breath go forth that it may renew the face of the earth. Show thy loving-kindness, that our land may give her increase; and so fill us with good things that the poor and needy may give thanks unto thy Name; through Christ our Lord.”

And then we see how in the Collect for Thanksgiving Day how we give thanks to God for his gracious answer to our prayers during Rogationtide: “*MOST merciful Father, who hast blessed the labours of the husbandman in the returns of the fruits of the earth; We give thee humble and hearty thanks for this thy bounty; beseeching thee to continue thy loving-kindness to us, that our land may still yield her increase, to thy glory and our comfort; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*”

We live in very prosperous times. By all accounts this is the best possible time to be alive in human history. This is especially true in the area of agriculture. There is so much food now that according to the World Health Organization there is a world obesity epidemic! And the World Food Program of the United Nations has for years declared that there is enough food on the planet to feed everyone. (The reason there is still famine and starvation in some parts of the world is because of war and social unrest, not because of lack of food.) Scientists believe that as technology continues to advance humanity will be able to grow more and more food on less land. We are already using land that was once thought unusable for farming. (The Dutch have done this very successfully, having reclaimed much land from the ocean for farming using sea walls.) Prices for food have plummeted and the choice of food is absolutely staggering. All of this means that we have a lot to be thankful for, and it bodes well for the future of the human race.

But it does not mean that we can take our abundance for granted. Natural disasters still happen and can cause great harm to farmers in different parts of the world. Fighting and unrest can harm the land and destroy ecosystems. Therefore we still must pray for God’s blessing upon the earth! While we are blessed with great technological advances in so many areas of life that does not make us invincible. Sometimes we can use our technological triumphs for evil purposes. Nuclear power is a good example of this. On one hand it provides the most abundant and cleanest energy for our high consumption society. But on the the other hand we can use it to make weapons of mass destruction. In other words, our life is very fragile, even in this highly advanced age.

So we must always pray as we do in the Litany (BCP, p. 57) “*That it may please [God] to give and preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth, so that in due time we may enjoy them.*” And we have to be responsible citizens of the earth, taking good care of it, and tending it as God created Adam and Eve to tend the Garden of Eden. We—at least in the United States— have done a great job at improving the environment over the last few decades, reducing greenhouse gases and carbon emissions long before any of these international treaties came into being. But there is still more work to do, and we cannot get cocky or prideful. We need God’s sustaining grace and mercy to preserve us and the wonderful world that he created for his honor and glory. And so it is for this we pray. ☩

PARISH NEWS & UPDATES:

Memorial Vestments

This month for Ascensiontide, Whitsundtide, and Trinity Sunday we are using the dalmatics and tunics purchased in loving memory of Kim Rutledge and Marcia Smithson. May God grant them eternal rest.

Weekly Online Catechesis

Join the rector on Facebook Live each week for about half an hour as he delves into some aspect of our faith and tradition. If you are not on Facebook you can watch the episodes on our YouTube channel. So far we have looked at the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, the King James Bible, the 1940 Hymnal, and the Ecclesiastical Year. There is a new topic each week, and each session is self-contained. Please check it out and tell your friends about it. (Note that the exact day and time of the presentation will vary depending on the rector's availability.)

Two New Books

Two new books have recently been released that may be of interest to some readers. The first is *The 1662 Book of Common Prayer International Edition* published by Intervarsity Press. This is a slightly updated version of the official Prayer Book of the Church of England. It contains additional prayers and litanies for different purposes that are found in ours and other Prayer Books. It also has prayers that may be read in lieu of prayers for the British Monarch, so this book could easily be used in many different settings around the world. Very obscure words and phrases have been carefully and thoughtfully updated, and a glossary is included. It has a lot of other nice additions as well, and the hardcover binding is very nice. It is very nice to see the classic BCP of the Anglican Communion updated for regular use today. It costs about \$25 on Amazon.

The other new book is *The Anglican Office Book* published by Whithorn Press in California. They are the publishing arm of St. Andrew's Academy, a classical Anglican school affiliated with the Reformed Episcopal Church. This is a thoughtful reprint and update of a book called *The Prayer Book Office* that was published back in 1944. The book is an expansion of the daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer from the Book of Common Prayer. It has additional hours of prayer added for use throughout the day along with additional

offices for special occasions. If we think of the Prayer Books offices of Morning and Evening Prayer as a cheeseburger, this book is like a Quarter Pounder with Cheese... it is still a cheeseburger, just bigger and with more toppings. This book is expensive (about \$75) and must be ordered directly from the press. A portion of the proceeds go to offset the tuition for the school students. The only downside about the book is that binding is softcover and very cheap, so if you get one treat it gingerly. It also smells kind of funny (cheap), but that would probably go away after a while. The contents are spectacular, however, and the printing is lovely, and in the end that is what really counts. So if you want to expand your recitation of the Divine Office a bit but still remain in Prayer Book territory then this book is highly recommended.

Nearing the End of Coronatide

Approximately one year ago on the Sunday after the Ascension Saint Alban's reopened for public worship. Now, a year later, the mask mandate has been lifted and we are free to worship without masks if we so desire. We are so thankful to be getting back to normal. We thank God for his watchcare over us during this crazy and stressful time. But remember, even though the pandemic appears to be winding down, be sure to play it safe. Get vaccinated, and continue to practice good personal hygiene. God will indeed always bless us, and he does keep his children safe... but he expect us to be wise and do our part to cooperate with his grace.

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)

Thank you for supporting Saint Alban's Anglican Church! We are entirely self-funded and not propped up by the diocese or a massive endowment. The biblical standard of giving for which we should aim is the "tithe" which means "10." A tithe to the church is 10% of our income. Please give as generously as you are able to our work and ministry so we may continue to grow and worship the Lord and share the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ☩