

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Spring is in the air! We are now in Easter season (Eastertide). Like Lent, Easter lasts for forty days. It ends on Ascension Day. The period between Easter and Ascension is called *The Great Forty Days*. During this period we mediate on the Paschal Mystery of Christ, his suffering, death, and resurrection. Let us remember that Easter is not something that only happened to Christ. It happens to us. Because Christ rose from the dead, so shall we, on the day of resurrection at the end of time, rise again from the dead. This is part of the Christian hope. Incidentally, each Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. The clergy and servers pray before each Sunday service: *O GOD, who makest us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of thy Son our Lord; Vouchsafe us this day such blessing through our worship of thee, that the days to come may be spent in thy service; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.*" (BCP, p. 595) Why not pray this prayer yourself on Sunday mornings before church?

In parish business news, you have all probably noticed the regular financial updates listed in the Sunday bulletin. It shows what it takes to run St. Alban's each week versus what we collected in the offering. It also has a running total of the annual surplus/deficit. This is to keep everyone informed of where we are financially. Currently we have about a \$1,200 YTD deficit. If you ever have any questions on this you can see me or the treasurer, Roy Siegel. Thank you for giving to St. Alban's. Without your generosity the church would cease to exist.

As we head into the spring and then the summer I encourage us to maintain a strong, personal commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the discipline of the spiritual life. It is not unusual for clergy to see folk begin a new year with all sorts of religious resolutions and devotion, but by the middle of the year these same folk have lapsed back into their old ways of lack of commitment, involvement, etc. An old saying goes, "Slow and steady wins the race." This is certainly true in the spiritual life. Stay committed to God, and to growing in his grace each day. Try to spend a little bit of time each day in prayer and devotion, such as studying the scriptures or reading a spiritual book. And most important of all, receive the Body and Blood of Christ each Sunday at Holy Communion. He gives us strength for our journey, which begins in this life, and ends in heaven!

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

J. Gordon Anderson

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UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

April 1st-3rd - Monday and Tuesday in Easter Week, and Annunciation (Transferred)

No services. Fr. Anderson out of town.

April 25th - St. Mark

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

May 1st - Ss. Philip and James

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

May 6th - 8th - Rogation Days

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

May 9th - Ascension Day

Holy Communion @ 7:00 p.m.

May 20th-21st - Monday and Tuesday in Whitsun Week

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

Prayer Book Holy Day Masses last a little over half an hour and, when celebrated in the morning, always include the office of Morning Prayer. Please make time to come out for these important days as you are able!

STRATEGIC PLANNING: *What does the future hold for St. Alban's Church?*

As I begin my third year at St. Alban's I am very thankful about how far we have come in certain areas. St. Alban's is a great church with a bright future!

Now to be sure, not everyone has thought this way about our church. For example, when I was a postulant for Holy Orders years ago I met a priest at synod who, when he found out that I was from St. Alban's, told me flatly, "That church is never going to grow." Back in 2010 when I arrived at St. Alban's to become rector a parishioner (who no longer attends) told me the same thing: "St. Alban's is never going to grow." Maybe some of us feel that way from time to time.

Well, I am happy to report that the naysayers are wrong! We are growing. Since my arrival in December of 2010 we have at least 30 new people regularly attending the church and involved in our life and activities. I am very thankful for every single person in our church family and am delighted to welcome new people to St. Alban's.

But despite the fact that we are growing we still have challenges ahead of us. Our major challenge at this point is our building. We need a larger facility not only to fulfill our mission to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people, but also to simply survive. Here is what I mean.

When the nave of the church is 80% full it comes across to visitors and potential new members as being *completely* full. Our church is "full" when we have 40 people. If we have any more

then it begins to get loud and very uncomfortable. Those who have heard me complain about parishioners not attending Sunday services have *also* heard me say in the same breath that I have no idea what we do if everyone actually showed up on a given Sunday, because there would be no room for everyone! But the seating issue is not only about noise and inconvenience. It is about survival. The problem with having a church that seats so few is that it will keep us from growing. And if we stop growing we will die.

The cost of living in Maryland is staggering. According to a recent study by the United States Census Bureau to be middle class in Maryland one must make 67K/year! The cost of living in our state will continue to rise as the years go on. For St. Alban's to survive and prosper she needs a full time priest. To afford one, the giving will have to increase. And the most realistic way to increase the giving is to attract additional members. *But we will not be able to attract new members if the church is "full."* So the bottom line is that St. Alban's will not survive unless she grows. And we won't grow if we are limited by our facilities. Besides new worship space we need a facility that has other amenities suitable for growing and expanding our ministry and mission. We need classrooms, offices, a nursery, a fellowship hall, kitchen, bathrooms, and so on.

So what can we do? We have three options. The first is to expand on our current land and building. The church explored this

under the previous incumbent, Fr. Unterburger. For \$800K we could do a modest expansion of the building. The second option is to build an entirely new building on this land... a building that is better situated on the land and more smartly designed. *The problem with these two options, however, is that we do not own our property.* It is under a land reversion clause, which means that as soon as we stop using this land for an Anglican church it reverts back to the original donor. Further, Maryland law seems to indicate that land reversion clauses have to be renewed every thirty years. So it is conceivable that in 2027 those who own our land could choose to *not* renew our title! Thus, every thirty years, we face the prospect of having to possibly vacate this property. A third option is to relocate, and build an entirely *new* church on a *new* piece of land that we own outright.

All of these options are staggering to consider. But consider them we must! Because if we don't we face the very real prospect of St. Alban's dying. And that is unacceptable. We have come to far to just curl up and die! St. Alban's is not ready to be put out to pasture just yet. By God's grace we are a dynamic and growing parish, and we will have a bright future if we remain faithful to God and to our mission to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world. God has big things in store for us. So let each of us pray for the future of our church, and that God would lead and guide us during this critical time in our history. ✠

CURRENT EVENTS: *Some Reflections on the History Channel's series "The Bible"*

During Lent the television and media world was abuzz about the History Channel's exciting series known as *The Bible*. The creators of the series, Roma Downey and Mark Burnett, conceived the project in part because the Bible is the foundational text of western culture, and yet more and more people are unfamiliar with all of its content. In an fantastic op-ed piece from the Wall Street Journal (March 1, 2013) the producers noted that for generations a person's intelligence was determined by how well he or she knew the Bible! What does such a statement imply about our contemporary society where so few people know the Bible?

Overall the miniseries was very well done. It had something for everyone... probably because because the Bible has something for everyone. Those tempted to nitpick about how various stories and details were presented should remember that the Bible is a very big book that covers thousands of years of history. Artistically speaking, it is impossible to capture all of the details of the various stories in four or five two-hour episodes. The series certainly holds its own with other famous dramatizations of the Bible, such as *The Ten Commandments*, and *The Passion of the Christ*. In some cases it even outdoes those old classics.

Many people from St. Alban's watched this series and commented on how interesting and exciting it was. The net result from watching it will hopefully be that people will get curious enough about the Bible to actually sit down and read parts of it. There is *no* substitute actually sitting down and reading and studying God's word! No movie, or TV show can replace opening the pages of this book and studying the written words, if for no other reason than that there is plenty of non-historical material in the Bible, such as poetry, that simply cannot be dramatized, and yet is important to know.

One of the things that I appreciated most about the miniseries is that it got me *thinking* once again about *how I read and understand it* the Bible. This is called *hermeneutics* - the science of *interpreting* the Bible. Hermeneutics is a most critical aspect of reading and studying the Bible. While most of us are not experts in this area, it is good to know that it exists, and that the Bible is book that needs to be

interpreted. Watching a series like "The Bible" can be especially helpful in this regard.

Because it is an ancient library of texts, written over many generations, by a great many people from all over the world, the Bible can be a difficult book to adapt for film and TV. So producers often have to make creative decisions as to how to develop the story in such a way as to make it appealing and understandable. And they often add extra-biblical elements to make the story flow better on screen. These additions are *interpretations*. Usually, in the better produced shows like "The Bible" they are perfectly harmless, and even helpful. But nonetheless, producers of programs like "The Bible" need to be very careful in how they choose to interpret biblical texts through these embellishments, because sometimes they might convey something that is their *own* idea rather than something that is found in the text of the Bible.

In the same way, *we* sometimes take a little bit of creative license when we read the Bible. We imagine how scenes must have played out, how people's voices sounded when they said certain things, and so on. We also might be tempted to fill in perceived or real historical and doctrinal gaps. All of this is unavoidable. *But like TV and movie producers, we too must be very cautious when we do this. We have to be extremely careful about reading our own assumptions into the text and its world because we may put something there that is not meant to be there!* While it is impossible to have an "Olympian" (i.e. pure, unbiased) view of the Bible, or anything else for that matter, we should at least be conscious that we bring to the text our own assumptions, and that sometimes those assumptions for various reasons are not always valid or correct (historically, theologically, morally, etc.).

That is but one thing that I got from watching this series. What did you get out of it? In a few weeks or so the church will have this series available to those who wish to view it. We also hope to be screening a much more in depth series on the Bible on DVD at the Tillinghast's house in the not-too-distant future. Please keep your eyes peeled for times and dates. In the meantime, remember that the best way to learn the Bible is to read and study it daily. And more important, the better we know the Bible the better we will know not only God and Christ, but also ourselves. ✠

PARISH NEWS AND NOTICES: *Please make a note of these important announcements and events!*

Join us for some of our new discipleship

activities: St. Alban's has a number of new activities that it would be great to see more folk involved with. The latest are our monthly *intercessory prayer meeting* and our weekly *bible study*. The prayer meeting convenes on the second Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. We share prayer requests and give updates on people for whom we've been praying. Then we have a brief service of Evening Prayer followed by a period of mental prayer for those in need. We are done by 8 p.m. The bible study meets every Thursday at 11:30 a.m. to study God's word for an hour. We go through a book of the bible chapter-by-chapter and study the meaning of the text for our lives today. You are welcome to bring a lunch or join us afterwards at 1 pm. at Bob Evans on Rt. 24 for lunch.

Sunday Morning Prayer at 9:15 a.m.: We will be continuing the tradition begun during Lent of reading Morning Prayer on Sundays between the 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. services. The only difference is that the time of the service will be 9:15 a.m., *not* 9:30 a.m. This is a good, quiet, and meditative way to prepare for Holy Communion at 10 a.m. Also, the Psalm, Old Testament lesson, and New Testament lesson for Morning Prayer help shed light on the scripture readings for Holy Communion.

Tuesday, April 9th - Evening Prayer and Study resumes: We will pick back up on Tuesday, April 9th at 6:30 p.m. for Evening Prayer, dinner, and our adult study. For the next few months the study will become an "Inquirers Class" and/or "Confirmation for the Already Confirmed!" We will be studying many different aspects of the Anglican faith tradition. The material we are using is published by St. Matthew's Church in Newport Beach, CA. Information on how to download it will be forthcoming.

Sunday, April 21st - A Night with Susan Dorsett: Come on out at 5 p.m. for a fun evening with Susan Dorsett as we watch the 2012 interview between her and a National Park Ranger about the

summer of 1942 that she spent with Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. Come hear wonderful stories about the Roosevelt family, Winston Churchill, and the Queen of the Netherlands. Memorabilia and pictures from Susan's summer at Eleanor's cottage and the big Roosevelt house in Hyde Park will be available. To top it all off we will enjoy a meal of the Roosevelt's favorite foods! Please sign up in the parish hall. See Linda Tillinghast or Father Anderson for more details.

Parish Wish List: Would you like to buy or contribute financially towards a gift for the parish in memory or honor of a loved one? Article X of the parish by-laws (available on our website) makes provision for purchasing needed liturgical items as memorials. We are currently in need of several items to help with the celebration of the sacred liturgy. Some of these are: purple cope, red cope, green cope, (\$1,500 ea.), rose vestment set (\$2,000), black funeral pall (\$2,200). Holy Water Vat (\$635). *Please note that donations for these types of items is something that is meant to go over and above your regular giving to the parish, not in lieu of it! We need your regular giving to the general fund to stay open.* Please see Fr. Anderson with any questions or for more details.

New Daily Devotional: Check out the literature table for a new daily devotional that you can take and use to help draw closer to God. It is called *Our Daily Bread* and is published by Radio Bible Class ministries. It has a scripture passage, short reflection, and prayer for each day of the year. Several parishioners already use this excellent little devotional and find it very spiritually uplifting and helpful.

New Quilt Raffle - Thanks to the generosity of Tammy Jones we will be having another quilt raffle to continue to raise money towards our rose vestment set. The new quilt will be displayed in the parish hall and we will sell tickets for it just as we did last year for the other quilt she made us. Tammy makes some gorgeous quilts, so it should not be hard to sell tickets to win one! ☘