

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

By the time you get this we will be in the midst of Holy Week and heading towards Easter. Our Lenten season here was strange to say the least. Attendance was down mainly because we missed two Sundays due to inclement weather. Others of course had to travel or were suffering from illness. That is fine. Sometimes the type of our employment keeps us away. That stuff happens to all of us sometimes. But some of us just skipped church altogether during Lent when none of that stuff was the case. Why, I don't know. All I can say is that we really need to get our priorities right in life, and tend to our souls better than we do. I was very disappointed at the low turnout for our Lenten services. I half expected it, and honestly was planning on doing *nothing* during Lent this year, but then - optimist that I am - I decided to give it "the old college try" and offer services every day so most people would have a chance to attend. But alas, only a few came out. A sincere thanks goes out to those of you showed up even once or twice! But of all the retired folk and there with flexible schedules very few over all made the effort to attend even one service. I just can't understand why - especially if we miss Sunday services for whatever reason - why we would not attend a weekday one if it is offered so as to worship the Lord in Word and Sacrament, and if our schedule during the week allows for it! Next year we will not have as many Lenten activities since most people just don't seem to care about them. Some folk say, "Well, I worship God on my own at home, in my own quiet time." That's good, we should. But that does *not* replace our obligation to come together as the Body of Christ and offer to him our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving - the Holy Eucharist - on the day of his resurrection (every Sunday). Too bad for those who hate "organized religion" because that is what Jesus started. Our relationship with him automatically puts us in relationship with everyone else in his mystical Body, the Church. We weaken and hurt the body by our absence from the life of the Church. Don't take my word for it, read what St. Paul says in his epistles to the Corinthians and Ephesians. Our parish, it's mission, and the work of the Church is weakened by our apathy. When people come and see that other people don't care about church they eventually ask themselves, "Why should I care?" And eventually everything falls apart. Spiritual sloth and disordered priorities are a cancer to the church. Years ago I saw a beautiful old theater in the Baltimore neighborhood of Highlandtown being torn down. Some long time area residents were outraged at this. I spoke with a businessman in the area about the controversy and he just shook his head and said, "Why are they complaining? It closed because they all stopped going to it." Folks, St. Alban's is simply not going to survive if our attitude towards God is "I don't care, I don't have time." Thankfully this is not the attitude of all of our people. Let's put God first in our life! When we see the results we'll be glad.

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

J. Gordon Anderson

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Holy Week Schedule

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

April 6th - Monday in Easter

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

April 7th - Tuesday in Easter

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 1st - Ss. Philip and James

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 11th - 13th - Rogation Days

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 14th - Ascension Day

Holy Communion at 5:00 p.m.

May 25th - 26th - Monday and Tuesday in Whitsun Week

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

THE CHURCH AND CULTURE: *ISIS and Moral Relativism*

The civilized world is aghast at the brutal and satanic violence of ISIS in the Middle East. These sick people have committed some of the most atrocious crimes against humanity in recent years. In the most wicked ways imaginable they indiscriminately slaughter both Moslems and non-Moslems who dare stand up to them. They prey on the weak and trample the vulnerable in their path to establish a pre-modern, medieval Islamic empire and ultimately world domination.

Not only are these thugs committing acts of violence against people, they are also doing so against some of the great cultural treasures of the world, revered by scholars, non-scholars, Moslems, non-Moslems alike... ranging from Islamic shrines, Christian churches, ancient artifacts, medieval manuscripts, and more. In this they are reminiscent of the Taliban regime that used to run Afghanistan, when they destroyed the international treasures that were the awesome statues of the Buddha known as "The Buddhas of Bamiyan" which were carved into mountains centuries earlier. Rather curiously, ISIS has also threatened to destroy the great mosque in Mecca because they see it as an "idol" that detracts from the worship of Allah.

So the whole civilized world is concerned about these madmen and what they will do next. We must pray for our leaders and the leaders of the world that God gives them wisdom as to how to deal with this growing menace.

We might feel completely safe from ISIS way over here in America, or in western Europe, but the reality is that we have a *different but related* set of problems with which to deal. Just as the ISIS threatens human life and culture, so here in the west the philosophy of "moral relativism"

threatens to completely undo us and bring our society and way of life to ruin.

Moral relativism is the idea that "morality" is "relative." That is to say, there are no universal, absolute notions of right or wrong, or good or bad. Rather, values differ from person to person, and society to society. What is right for one person may be wrong for another. What is true for one person may be false for another. What is good for one society may be bad for another, and so on.

In opposition to the concept moral relativism is the concept of absolute truth. This is the notion that there are *universal* standards of right and wrong, good and bad, to which all are held accountable. The Ten Commandments cover a lot of these. It is always wrong, for example, to murder. It is always wrong to lie. It is always wrong to commit adultery, and so on.

Moral relativists on the other hand would assert that there are circumstances where it is okay to break one's marriage vows, to steal, to lie, etc. It may be wrong for *this* person to commit adultery because his wife is so nice, but it is *not* wrong for *that* person to commit adultery because his wife is cold and distant. Or, he might say that *this* culture accepts child sacrifice (as some ancient Canaanite societies did), while *that* culture (the ancient Hebrews) abhor it, and that is just the way it is! Both are right according to their own internal and subjective understanding of right and wrong. And who is he to "judge" anyway? For as we all learned from 1980's talk shows, I may have "my truth" regarding these matters, but other people have "their truth," and both are "valid" even (oddly enough) if they contradict each other.

Well, it is not hard to see where such thinking eventually leads people and societies. It leads to complete

moral chaos and ruined human lives. This appears to be where the United States and many other western countries are heading. The "free love" culture has, for example, resulted in untold numbers of lost lives in abortion, STDs, as well as broken homes and traumatized children. The fact that we have laws that forbid certain types of behavior is proving to be more and more meaningless, as civil laws can simply be changed by a majority vote. We might say, for example, "Of course it is wrong to murder, we have laws against that." But why can't laws be changed? Why can't we "redefine" what we don't like? We have been seeing this happen in the area of marriage. Why could it not happen in other areas as well?

The sad thing about moral relativism is that no one really believes it, including those who may subscribe to it! If someone commits a heinous act, such as ISIS fighters raping captive women of an ethnic minority, the consistent moral relativist is hard pressed to find anything wrong with it, because ISIS has "their truth" while he has his. The outrage we feel when someone lies, or commits murder should in fact give us a clue that we are, in our heart of hearts, not moral relativists. Most of us do believe in absolute standards of right and wrong, and this is evident when we get angry and make value judgments like, "That was wrong."

Why do we think this in our hearts? Why do we and most people have laws that define murder or breaking contracts as wrong? It is because we are made in the image and likeness of God, and because he speaks to us through our conscience. Moral absolutes and absolute truth, you see, are ultimately rooted in a transcendent God. What we see, as God is pushed to the margins of our society, is an increase in moral

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THEOLOGY: *Falling Into Nothingness, by the Rev'd William Martin, SSC*

When St. Augustine describes the Fall of Man, he reminds us that the eating of the forbidden fruit is an outward and visible effect of an inward and spiritual cause that preceded it. Nothing in creation compels a man to sin necessarily. The sin germinates and grows in the mind and then the heart before manifesting itself externally and visibly. So the first sin is committed inwardly and invisibly. The sin is pride. Augustine tells us that our first parents fell into disobedience because already they were secretly corrupted; for the evil act would never have been done had not an evil will preceded it. And what is the origin of our evil will but pride? For 'pride is the beginning of sin' [Ecclus. x. 13] And what is pride but the craving for undue exaltation? And this is undue exaltation, when the soul abandons Him to whom it ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself. This happens when it becomes its own satisfaction... This falling away is spontaneous; for if the will had remained steadfast in the love of that higher and changeless good by which it was illumined to intelligence and kindled into love, it would not have turned away to find satisfaction in itself... The wicked deed... the transgression of eating the forbidden fruit was committed by persons who were already wicked. (DCD, xiv. 13) And let us not be mistaken; Augustine is not saying that man is created evil or predisposed to it by reason of his nature. Man, like all other creatures, is made good to serve the Good. But he turns away from it inwardly and spiritually by an act of will. And so Augustine wants to know what caused Adam to turn away from the Good? Augustine suggests that man's turning away from God might have something to do with the fact that *he was made out of nothing*. The problem is that when man turns toward himself and away from God he turns towards the *nothingness*. Man's being has meaning and definition only in relation to God's creative goodness. So when he turns from God, he becomes *less real*. His being is now seen apart from God's munificence. Of course, man does not lose his being entirely in turning away from God. But *he does come closer to nothingness*. He still exists and so *has being*. But his being is now divorced from its root and source. The Divine creative intentionality for his being is challenged. Its meaning and purpose are now explored and discovered in the absence of God's goodness - i.e. without the Divine wisdom, love, and power that made him *to be something*. And thus man has disobediently forsaken his origin and end through pride, and instead of rising has fallen because he has imagined his potentiality apart from God. *Humility exalts the mind, and self-exaltation abases it*. So it would seem that Adam or Man was bent on *making something out of nothing* without recourse to the Divine

illumination and wisdom. Perhaps it would be better to say that Man intended to *make something new out of nothing*. Now, of course, everything that man could discover from creation would indeed be *new* to him if he had remained faithful and obedient to God. His innate desire to discover the truth of the universe and God from the creation is not evil at all. The problem was that he wanted to go at it on his own and without God's guidance. He wanted to be *original*, when, as we all know, He couldn't! You can't be original unless you are the Origin. Everything that man is made to learn and understand is already existing as perfectly present to the mind of God. To be sure, *that* it is waiting to be discovered and given articulation and usefulness is excitingly attractive. But man was made to see both the ability to discover and what is discovered as gifts of God's Grace to be embraced and cherished as part of nature that could share in God's knowledge of and desire for them. As we all know, man has been busy *making something new out of nothing* for centuries. He has judged himself to be the final arbiter and judge of what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is not, and so on... *ad nauseam*. And so where does that leave him? Well, as we can all see rather clearly, *in Hell*. *Hell* is alive and well to the minds and hearts of those who no longer *feel after God to find Him*. *Hell* is the attempt to live without God. What defines the lives of most men in this *post-modern age*? Another word for *Hell*? *Nothingness*. Man is moved and defined by *nothing*. *Nothing* bothers or irritates, or even excites and inspires him. *Nothing* is the matter, because *Nothing matters*. And despite the protestations of those who try to make something matter, there is clearly nothing that binds men together these days except for an absence of Goodness, an absence of Truth, and an absence of Beauty. Should anyone try to assert the primacy of absolute truth, beauty, or goodness in the post-modern jungle that man indwells, he is judged to be bigoted, prejudiced, and closed. But what is so funny about it all, at the end of the day, is that it is only through the Judaeo-Christian understanding of reality that the freedom to choose nothing is thinkable. Nevertheless, Jews and Christians alike have been busy denying the God who has given them the freedom to reject Him for quite some time....opting for nothing. It will interesting to see in the coming years to see just how much of this nothingness will last. Nothing comes from nothing. The logical effect of it all might be mass-suicide, though even post-modern lobotomized lunatics still draw the line at selfish self-preservation. So what then? Anarchy. And what after that? Well, temporally perhaps, and eternally for certain, Something that the worshipers

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of nothingness will experience as far, far worse than obedience to the God who alone can make something true, beautiful, and good out of nothing. ☩

The Rev'd William Martin is rector of St. Michael the Archangel Church in North Carolina. He studied philosophy,

classics, and theology at King's College in Nova Scotia and at Oxford (St. Stephen's House). Fr. Martin serves on the Board of Examining Chaplains, the board of the Prayer Book Society, and has recently been appointed dean of Logos House, an Anglican distance learning seminary based on Maine.

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relativism, and a corresponding increase in sin and evil. The heinous thievery of Bernie Madoff, who robbed innumerable people of their life savings, is a perfect example of moral relativism, and how it is a cancer that destroys everything... witness the tragic deaths of his two sons and the destruction of his marriage because of his actions! As God is rejected by our society our whole edifice of law and order begins to crumble, because *positive* law - laws enacted by people - are rooted in the

natural and eternal law of God. Relativism on the other hand says that there are *no* laws, *no* absolutes, *no* universal standard of right and wrong. That we still, nonetheless, and rather inconsistently, have some idea of right and wrong indicates that the vestiges of Christian civilization have not been lost completely, and that God's Spirit is still moving in our consciences. Thank goodness for that. May the fire of God's truth burn bright in our culture once again! ☩

PARISH NEWS & UPDATES: *Please note these important items!*

Honoring Barb Youngman:

“In order to honor the memory of our beloved friend and colleague, Barb Youngman, who left us in October, Edgewood Library and Harford County Public Library senior staff have decided to add several “I am a Nurse” themed kits to our Little Leapers collection. Barb had a long career as a nurse before going HCPL Circulation staff, and those of us in her EDG family are very pleased with the idea of remembering her in this way. To help fund these kits, the EDG staff recently held bake sales at the branch and in Riverside, getting us off to a great start. We know that barb touched many lives across the HCPL system, and we hope you will join our efforts to raise money to remember her in this special way by using the Foundation Memorial form for Barb Youngman Project to make your donation in her name. You can find the form on the HR & PRS page, or by going to the following link: <https://passport.hcplonline.info/form/Barb%20Youngman%20-%20Memorial%20DonationForm.pdf> We would like to have the kits available next fiscal year and so we are looking to have all contributions received by June 12th. Any contribution you may be able to provide will be greatly appreciated.” Many Thanks, EDG Staff

Ascension Day Service and Supper:

Join us on Thursday, May 14th at 5:00 p.m. for our Ascension Day service followed by our annual spaghetti supper! We are going to try to have the supper earlier this

year to maximize participation, particularly for those with families. The service should be no more than an hour and then we'll immediately begin feasting!

Art Show:

Father Anderson will be having an exhibition of his paintings at the Liriodendron in Bel Air from July 12th - August 9th. The show will feature icons and large scale oil paintings of various biblical themes. The oil paintings will be the large ones on display at the church, but the icons will be almost all brand new. The Liriodendron Gallery is open on Sundays from 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. Please come out on the opening day and check out the work and spread the word!

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)

“My bounden duty [as a member of the Church] is to follow Christ, to worship God every Sunday in his Church; and to work and pray and give for the spread of his kingdom.” (BCP, p. 291) ☩