

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

We are now in the pre-Lent and Lenten seasons. I do not have any special devotions planned for this year other than our usual Tuesday Evening Prayer service followed by dinner and class and, of course, our monthly intercessory prayer meeting. While it would be nice to have Stations of the Cross and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament (both traditional Lenten devotions) it seems that no one can really make it out during the week for these devotional activities. So there is no point in offering them. On that note, I would love to know what it would take to get more people to come out the existing devotional and educational activities that we do offer. I am always open to input and suggestions, especially if there is a topic that people would like to explore and discuss in class. Don't be shy! Suggest away. Lent, of course, is a time when we take on a discipline. It is customary to *give something up* in order to help mortify the flesh. It is also customary to *do something*... some extraordinary act of devotion during this season. What do you have planned? If anyone needs suggestions for the "do something" part, then let me offer the following: come out on Tuesday nights; join us for Prayer Book Holy Day services; read through a book of the bible; read a devotional book, such as *Imitation of Christ*. The very devout might actually consider coming to church each Sunday! All kidding aside, let me say again what I've mentioned in the past: we will only get something from the spiritual life if we put something into it... some effort and discipline. Another Lenten custom is of course to make a private confession of sin. Last month the world was reeling from the news that cyclist Lance Armstrong finally confessed to doping. He went to Oprah Winfrey, one of today's "secular saints," to make his confession and receive absolution. He did so, and he probably felt a lot better as a result. For many people the thought of privately confessing sins to a priest is terrifying. But if Lance can do it before someone who is not a priest (and not bound by the strict confidentiality of the confessional seal), and in front of millions of viewers, then so can we. Lent is the time to wash our souls in the cleansing fountain that is the reconciling forgiveness of Jesus Christ. We do not need to walk around with a guilty conscience. If there is something to get off of our chest, and we want to do so in private before the Lord and his priest then I am more than willing to hear your confession. Just let me know. *(Whatever you do, just don't ask Oprah to hear your confession, as I believe her Orders are highly irregular, or quite possibly even invalid!)* ☺

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

J. Gordon Anderson

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Be sure to check out the latest notices and announcements from St. Alban's

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

February 13th - Ash Wednesday

Holy Communion w/ Imposition of Ashes and Penitential Office @ 6:30 p.m.

February 20th - Ember Day

Holy Communion @ 6:30 p.m.

February 25th - St. Matthias (transferred)

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

March 24th - Holy Week

March 24th - March 30th

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.

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!

MORAL THEOLOGY: *The Vice of Acedia and the Virtue of Hope*

One of the topics that is often discussed in moral theology are the so-called seven deadly sins (or seven “capital” sins). One of these is the sin, or vice, of sloth. The dictionary defines sloth as *reluctance to work or make an effort; laziness.*

If we think about it there are several types of sloth. There is “bodily” sloth, characterized by laziness in work; “intellectual” sloth, characterized by laziness of thinking; and “moral” sloth, characterized by laxity in living. All of these are pretty bad, not only for the person guilty of them, but also for those living in proximity to him or her. Sin has a notorious way of affecting others besides ourselves!

But there is another type of sloth... “spiritual” sloth, otherwise known as *acedia*. According to one author, this vice manifests itself in “...a sad dejection of spirit, a compound of despair and boredom. It finds no good and no pleasure in anything. It makes no effort of the will to rouse itself from the contemplation of its own misery.”

The person mired in acedia finds himself “...out of sorts with God, the world, and himself. He feels an acute and universal boredom. Nothing is any good or gives pleasure. In particular spiritual goods, prayer, worship, and communion with God seem to be dust and ashes.” (both quotes from *Christian Ethics* and *The Elements of Moral Theology*, by R.C. Mortimer)

The thing about acedia which makes it a form of spiritual laziness is that there are obvious

means of grace available to help one be free from its despairing grip. But rather than be liberated the person chooses to wallow in misery! It is easier and more comfortable to be in a spiritual malaise, or be spiritually dead, than to be alive in Jesus Christ.

Acedia is highly dangerous to the soul. When the spiritual gloom of acedia begins to take root in us our prayer seems to lose its power, and our devotional life begins to



fall away. It has the power to paralyze us and completely derail our spiritual life. It makes us stop growing spiritually. And just as the other types of sloth are bad not only for the person guilty of them, but also for those around him, so acedia has a terrible effect on the larger body of Christ.

Sometimes in churches one finds a person with acedia. He has a dreary and miserable countenance. He has long since stopped ministering in the church, or doing other activities. All he does is the obligatory Sunday service. When you walk into

church you see him sitting there in his pew with such a morose scowl glued to his face that it would make a toad envious! You try to engage him in conversation and fellowship, and talk to him about how things are going, but all to no avail. His monotone response is invariably one of doom and despair. “Everything is a conspiracy,” he tells you. “There is no hope.” Talking with the person mired in acedia can be like getting sucked into a vortex.

The way to counteract acedia is through the virtue of hope. This virtue is “a motion toward a future good that is difficult but possible to attain.” (Mortimer) The object of this hope is God who is almighty, and also our loving heavenly Father. The person of hope says with St. Paul, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31)

Hope is an *infused* virtue. It is something with which God supernaturally fills us. And the sacraments are the normal means for God to communicate his grace to us. So to grow in hope we need to make regular use of the sacraments, especially the Gospel sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, but also the Church sacrament of confession. Developing a *rule of life* (i.e. a set of spiritual exercises that we do each day) that includes serious, regular study of the bible, and prayer also goes a long way toward freeing us from the spiritual doldrums.

In the season where we focus especially on discipline, may we be cautious against drifting into *acedia*, the sin of spiritual sloth. ✠

THE LECTIONARY: *The Prophets and the Pre-Lent and Lenten Seasons*

During Evening Prayer in the pre-Lent and Lenten seasons we read through portions of the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. What is the prophetic literature and why do we read it during the Lenten season?

First some background on the prophetic books. In biblical study the term “prophetic literature” refers to the books of the prophets in the Old Testament. Prophets were men (and in some cases women.. cf. Luke 2:36) who were given a special charism (gift) and vocation by God to communicate his will to his people at particular times for specific purposes. They appear more in the Old Testament than in the New Testament, but the latter does tell of the occasional prophet (e.g. John the Baptist, Anna, etc.). St. Paul likewise speaks of prophets and of prophecy as a spiritual gift.

In the Old Testament we read of many prophets. King Saul had the gift of prophecy. There was the prophet Nathan, who rebuked King David for his adultery. And many, many others who make brief and always highly interesting cameo appearances throughout the historical books. There were even “schools” of prophets: large groups of people who had this gift and exercised it in various ways, though we have no surviving record of how they did so. Related to the phenomenon of prophets were the so-called *false prophets*. These were spiritual hucksters who purported to be true prophets who spoke for God, but instead were after financial gain. There were also prophets associated with other near-eastern deities that we read about in the bible, such as the infamous “Prophets of Baal” with whom the prophet Elijah clashed.

But typically when we think of prophets we think of those books of the bible at the end of the Old Testament. These contain writings attributed to some of the most important biblical prophets, or tell stories of their lives and ministries. There are *major* prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations (written by the prophet Jeremiah), Ezekiel, and Daniel. And there are *minor* prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The former are longer books, and the latter are shorter books (hence the name *minor*). Though we should

bear in mind that since all of these books are part of the bible (see *Articles of Religion, VI*), the inspired word of God, there is really nothing “minor” about the minor prophets!

The prophetic literature that we read through this time of year includes portions of Amos, Hosea, Jonah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. During Holy Week we read Lamentations, Zechariah, and Isaiah. Since Lent is a special time to examine ourselves and repent of our sins it makes sense to read the writings of the prophets. Because the main thing that the prophets did was call God’s people to repent of their sins and be faithful to the covenant. The Israelites sinned against their neighbor and God, being guilty of social injustice, and pagan idolatry. The prophets that we focus on this time of year address these very issues.

Most of pre-Lent is spent with the minor prophet Amos. His is the oldest prophetic book, dating from sometime between 760-750 B.C. He was a shepherd who received a special call from God to preach against the social ills of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He is the prophet of social justice par excellence. In strong, poetic language he condemns external religious ceremony and practice that camouflages social corruption, and is not accompanied by internal conversion of heart to the Lord.

Lent itself is spent mostly with the major prophet Jeremiah. He was active from about 627 B.C. until the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. He lived through a period of great social turmoil, war, and intrigue. The dominant theme of Jeremiah is the devastating consequences of sin. Sin brings sorrow. Even if God pardons sin, one must still suffer the consequences of it. But God punishes the sinner in order to heal him - to bring him to repentance and a change of heart. So God’s punishments are purifying.

Why not make it a point to read through one of the shorter minor prophets, or through portions of one of the major prophets during Lent? Their exhortations to godliness are valid for our lives even today. You can use the reading plan in the lectionary (BCP pp. xxvii, xix, and xxi), use the bible reading plan that was given out at church, or make up your own plan. If you would like to borrow a commentary, or want to buy one, to help understand the book please see the rector for a recommendation. ✠

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

Tuesday Night Adult Forum: Join us on Tuesday nights during pre-Lent and Lent for our study on the virtues, where we will look at the four Cardinal Virtues (prudence, temperance, justice, fortitude) and the three Theological Virtues (faith, hope, and charity). This topic falls under the category of *moral theology*, which is the study of human behavior from the moral and theological perspectives. As usual, we meet at church at 6:30 p.m. for Evening Prayer, followed by a supper (provided), and then the study. We always finish by 8:30 p.m.

New Mass Setting for Lent: Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our organist and choir we will be singing new service music until Easter. We will be using the “4th Communion Service” also known as *Missa Marialis*. It is found in the Hymnal on pp. 719-723. This music dates from the high Middle Ages. It has been sung by saints around the world for many hundreds of years! I hope that this setting will become our regular service music for the season of Lent. It shouldn't be that hard to master, as it is a *plainsong* setting... and the people of St. Alban's are very good at singing plainsong chant. Once the tune is learned we will all be singing it in our sleep. And further, we will only be singing *Kyrie*, *Sanctus & Benedictus*, and *Agnus Dei*. It is not that hard to learn three new songs. Anyone who tries can learn three new songs... especially if it for the glory of God! The members of the choir will be there to lead the rest of us, and there will also be a bulletin insert with easy-to-read musical notation to help us all sing along. So give it a chance, and the proverbial “old college try” and we should be enjoying this new setting perfectly in no time flat! (*Note: Most of us already know part of this Mass setting. The Lord's Prayer, which we sometimes sing, comes from this service! So if anyone thinks they can't learn parts of this setting, think again!*)

Tuesday, Feb. 12th - Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper: The men of the server's guild will be hosting this annual parish event. We will meet at the church at 6:30 for Evening Prayer. The supper will immediately follow the service. Please sign up

in the parish hall so we know how many people are coming.

Wednesday, Feb. 13th - Ash Wednesday: Join us at 6:30 p.m. for our Ash Wednesday service. The choir will be singing, and we will have our usual service of Imposition of Ashes, Penitential Office, and Holy Communion. Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent.

2013 Lenten Appeal: This year we will be collecting funds for the bishop's lenten appeal as usual. At this point the rector does not know what it is, but when he does everyone will be made aware. Last year we raised money for the Church in Haiti. We will also raise money for a special parish lenten appeal as we did last year, which resulted in our beautiful new altar crucifix which has enhanced our worship many times over. More information on this will be forthcoming as well.

Regular Financial Updates: St. Alban's needs \$1,923 each week to make budget. In an effort to keep everyone up to date with where we are financially the Sunday bulletin will contain the previous weeks' giving in comparison with our expenses. This will enable everyone to see whether or not we have a surplus or (much more likely) a deficit.

New Parish Directory: The new parish directory of members and friends is constantly being updated. If any of your information changes (phone numbers, e-mail, address, etc.) please let the rector know immediately. The latest version will be officially released at Easter. If anyone needs an updated one before then please see the rector.

Please remember St. Alban's in your estate planning: *“The Minister is ordered, from time to time, to advise the People, whilst they are in health, to make Wills arranging for the disposal of their temporal goods, and, when of ability, to leave Bequests for religious and charitable uses.”* (BCP, p. 320) ☩