

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Growing up there was always music playing in our house. As a young, elementary school aged boy I remember my father often had the classical music station playing on the radio so all could hear and enjoy it. To this day I think that is one of the main reasons why I enjoy listening to classical music. But as I grew up a different sort of music began to fill our home... that of "The Grateful Dead," the folk/acid rock group that came out of San Francisco in the late 1960's. My oldest sister was a "deadhead" - a devoted fan of the group. She lived and breathed the deadhead culture. She went to concerts far away to see them play, wore all of the shirts, bought all of merchandise, traded the music, and eventually even married a deadhead. Neither of my parents had any use for "The Dead" or the culture surrounding them. To my poor sullen father they epitomized a slacker, underachieving, and do-nothing way of life. Well, in the late 1980's, at the height of the MTV days, the music world went abuzz with news that the Grateful Dead were finally going to release a music video. You see, because they were so "authentic" the Dead would never stoop so low and become so commercial as to release a music video! But apparently the financial lure was too much to resist. So they made a video for their song "A Touch of Gray" from their new album. MTV naturally gave the video heavy airplay. The refrain from the song, belted out by Jerry Garcia in his raspy, nasally voice, went: "I will get by. I will get by. I will get by. I will survive." I'll never forget my father's disgust when he heard those words: "That is the mentality of the Grateful Dead world," he thundered, "I'll get by. I will survive," *You have to do more than just try to 'get by' in life!* He was 100% correct, and his ranting and raving that day made a lasting impression on me, encouraging me to strive for excellence and get the most out of life and not just slink by. You know what? Many Christians today have a "Grateful Dead" approach to the spiritual life: "I'll get by." We do the barest *minimum* to qualify as Christians. We are spiritual slackers. We never read the bible; we attend church sporadically at best; we don't pray to God and meditate on him and his wonders; we don't try to discover his will for our lives and walk therein, and so on. We are just coasting... "we will get by." That, I submit, is why so many professing Christians get so little out of their spiritual life, and eventually fall by the spiritual wayside. And that is one reason why the world is such a mess. Christians are no longer the "salt and light" of the world (Mt. 5:13-16) because we are content to just "get by" spiritually. God expects more from us. To get something from the spiritual life we must *have* a spiritual life. And we develop a spiritual life by intentionally *doing* spiritual things. We need to make this our goal. So cultivate your spiritual life by spending quality time with God each day, taking concrete actions to deepen your faith in God. The more we exalt him in our lives, and center our hearts and affections on Jesus, the more and more we will be transformed into his image and likeness.

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor, *J. Gordon Anderson*

February 2015

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UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

February 2nd - Purification

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

February 18th - Ash Wednesday

Holy Communion at 6:30 p.m.

February 24th - St. Matthias

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

February 25th - Ember Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

February 27th - Ember Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

February 28th - Ember Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

March 25th - Annunciation

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

March 29th - April 4th - Holy Week

Schedule TBA

April 25th - St. Mark

Holy Communion - 10:00 a.m.

THEOLOGY: *A Brief Look at Some of the Theological Differences Between Islam and Christianity*

Islam has been front and center in the news in the recent days. The civilized world weeps at the violence and destruction wrought by certain extremist Moslems around the globe. Horrific tragedies such as the attack in Paris and the ongoing violence in Nigeria and the Middle East have given rise to all sorts of questions about this religion and the people who follow it.

How much do we as Christians know about Islam? Let us look at some of the main aspects and teachings of this important and influential world religion and compare them to the teachings of the Christian religion, *all the while bearing in mind that these topics go much, much deeper, and touch on so many more important dimensions than can be mentioned here.*

Islam and Christianity are monotheistic. "Monotheism" is the belief that there is only one God. We Christians confess this doctrine at almost every Holy Eucharist when we recite the Nicene Creed: *"I believe in one God."* Muslims believe in one God too. They call God "Allah" which is simply the Arabic word for God. Their creed goes, *"There is no God but God, and Muhammed is God's prophet."* But does this mean that Christians and Moslems have the same understanding of God? By no means! The main difference between the Christian and Muslim understanding of God is that we Christians believe that the one eternal God exists in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost (the Holy Trinity). Muslims think this is heretical and that Christians are tri-theists (believers in three gods). This is not true. In fact, the doctrine of tri-theism is *explicitly denied* in the famous Athanasian Creed. Christians would argue among other things that the Moslem "monistic" understanding of God is inconsistent with how is described by their own holy book and

tradition, which teach something of a plurality within God - namely, that the Qur'an is the "word" of God, just as Jesus is the word in the Christian faith! Would it not then be the case, perhaps, that a unity-in-plurality is a philosophical and theological necessity and *not* a heresy after all? Maybe Moslems should reconsider the doctrine of the Holy Trinity beginning with a look at their own sacred texts!

Islam does not believe that man has a sinful nature. This is one of the key elements of the Christian religion. Following St. Paul and St. Augustine, we believe that we have inherited a fallen nature from our first parents, and that Jesus came to redeem us and give us salvation. Moslems on the other hand believe that our first parents indeed sinned, but that their sin was later forgiven them, *and that their progeny and the creation itself were in no way affected by their sin.* If anything we sometimes make bad choices and do stupid things, but that does not say anything about our nature, or mean that it is corrupt. But here is the question: if man is not sinful then why he needs "religion" or salvation?

Islam does not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, or God incarnate (in the flesh). Though Moslems honor Jesus on some level they believe him to be only a prophet, after the manner of Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and others. He was a human being alone just like you and me. The Qur'an categorically rejects that he is the Son of God, and that God could even have a Son. Needless to say it also rejects the idea, as we saw a above, that he or anybody could be "of one substance with the Father." (i.e. God in the flesh) But Jesus himself in the Gospels proclaimed himself to be the Son of God many times, and others said the same about him. Furthermore, this has been the

consistent witness of the Church since its inception. The early councils were convened to deal with the question of whether or not Jesus was of "one being" with the Father. So in no way was there ever any doubt that Jesus was God's Son!

Islam believes that Muhammed was God's final prophet and that the Qur'an is God's final revelation. God chose many people to act as prophets in the history of the world, but for Moslems Muhammed was God's final prophet. Thus, the message that God revealed to him, and his traditional sayings (Hadith) trump - in their mind - every other message of God that came before. Moslems argue that the Bible - and by extension, the Christian tradition - was corrupted. So passages such as the first chapter of Hebrews, which speak of Jesus as being the final revelation of God the father, are, to the Moslem mind, invalid texts. Well, the most basic problem with this view is that it is the view of just about every new religion that comes along. The Mormon religion, for example, teaches the same thing regarding the canonical scriptures: they were corrupted early on, and so now God has given to a new prophet (in their case, Joseph Smith) a new revelation (the Book of Mormon). It is the easy way out. Rather than discuss the real philosophical, dogmatic, moral, and other issues between the old and new religions it just blithely dismisses them on the basis of an unproved bromide.

This is just a very simple overview of some of the basic differences between Islam and Christianity. There are indeed more which touch on many important topics. We must not see these things as boring, abstract concepts irrelevant and unrelated to anything else. Because as one scholar once said, "Ideas have consequences." ✠

LITURGY & WORSHIP: *The Propers of the Mass*

In our Sunday service leaflet on the first page is a list that gives the “propers” for the particular Sunday or feast day we are celebrating. If it is the First Sunday in Advent, for example, the list reads “Propers for Advent I.” What are propers?

If we look at the service for Holy Communion we immediately notice that there are parts that always stay the same and parts that change. The parts that stay the same are called the *ordinary* of the Mass. These include the Kyrie (“Lord, have mercy...”), Gloria (“Glory be to God on high”), Credo (“I believe in one God”), Sanctus/Benedictus (“Holy, Holy, Holy... Blessed is he that cometh...”), and the Agnus Dei (“O Lamb of God...”).

But other parts of the Mass change depending on what particular day we are celebrating. These are called the *propers* because they are “proper” to that particular service. At a minimum they include a Collect (the thematic prayer for the day), Epistle, and Gospel and sometimes a special preface to the Prayer of Consecration. So at each Mass we have parts that stay the same (the ordinary) and parts that are variable (the proper).

The list of readings for each service that we have in the leaflet contains the full selection of variable propers for the Mass appointed for each Sunday. These include not only the familiar Collect, Epistle, and Gospel from the Book of Common Prayer, but also what are sometimes called the “minor propers” which are read or chanted at appointed times throughout the 10:00 a.m. service. They consist of the *Introit* - a Psalm verse said before the Kyrie, the *Gradual and Alleluia (or Tract)* (said or chanted between the Epistle and Gospel), the *Offertory* (said or chanted before the altar is set up for Mass), and the *Communion* (said or chanted immediately after the Holy Communion).

As we see in the bulletin these “minor propers” are simply short portions of the Psalms or a verse from the scriptures that relate to the feast day and its major propers. What the minor propers help us do is constantly throughout the service recall the theme of the particular Mass we are celebrating. They are very helpful spiritually because it is so easy to zone out during the ordinary and other unchanging parts of the Mass. Elements that change from week to week, or season to season like the propers (major and minor) are beneficial in terms of keeping our hearts and minds focused on the task of worshipping God.

Let us examine more closely each of these parts of the Mass.

Introit: This consists of a Psalm verse, Gloria Patri (“Glory be to the Father...”), and antiphon (a repeat of part

of the Psalm verse). It may be sung or chanted as the clergy and servers enter the church for Mass, and that indeed seems to be its original purpose. Since we at St. Alban’s always have a processional hymn at this time the introit is said after the *Collect for Purity* (“Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open...”).

Gradual/Alleluia or Tract: These come between the Epistle and Gospel reading. They are, again, Psalm verses. The “gradual” is so called because it was originally read on the altar step (*Gradus* is Latin for “step”) or while the deacon was ascending the steps of the ambo (like our modern day pulpit) to read the Gospel. The “alleluia” is a verse of scripture that is preceded and followed by two “alleluias”. It is, naturally, omitted during the penitential seasons of the year. During these time, when there is no Gradual and Alleluia, there is a “Tract” in its place, which is just another Psalm, though often longer than the Gradual Psalm verse, such as on Palm Sunday.

Offertory: This is another Psalm verse specially appointed for each Sunday that is read immediately after the sermon and before the altar is set up and we collect the tithes and offerings. The tradition of having an offertory verse goes back all the way to the time of St. Augustine. (354-430 A.D.) You may have noticed, though, that we actually read *two* sets of offertory verses each Sunday at St. Alban’s. First we read the proper Psalm verse for the particular Mass, and then we read a special passage from the scriptures that is appointed from the Book of Common Prayer. The reason for this is that the first reading has to do more with the spiritual theme of the Mass while the second reading has to do more with giving to support the work of the ministry. Since both are important and need to be emphasized we read both.

Communion: This is a Psalm verse or other passage of scripture that is said or sung after the ablutions (when the priest “cleans up” the altar after the Holy Communion). Originally it was a long passage that was sung *during* the Holy Communion but over the years it was abbreviated to a short verse. It dates all the way back to the 4th century.

These propers, peppered throughout the service, are little anchor points for us to grab onto and meditate upon as the sacred liturgy progresses. Some people wonder why we do not have a long responsive Psalm read during the service. This is why. The minor propers are the Psalms appointed for the service. So let us be sure to meditate on these verses as they are being read or sung as they will help draw us deeper and deeper into the mystery of our redemption in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. ✠

 THE CENTURION RECOMMENDS: *“The Best Intentions” by Ingmar Bergman*

Looking for a great movie to curl up and watch this winter? *The Centurion* recommends “The Best Intentions” by the late Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman. Written by Bergman, and directed by Bille August, this cinematic masterpiece won the highly coveted *Palm d’Or* at the 1992 Cannes Film Festival. It tells the true story of his parents and their courtship and early years together. Like most children, Bergman had, by his own admission, a “larger-than-life” view of his parents. So one of his goals in writing this screenplay was to demythologize them, as it were, and discover the real people that lay below his grandiose view of them. The result is one of the most artistically stunning and emotionally moving films of the 1990’s.



In the beautifully shot movie we meet Bergman’s father, Erik, (renamed Henrick for the film), who came from a poor family and rose to become a prominent priest in the Church of Sweden. And we meet his mother, Karin, (renamed Anna for the film), who came from a family of wealthy industrialists, and was used to life of privilege and comfort. Their story is told from when they first met to

the time when young Ingmar was in utero. The contrast between them and their respective families, along with the difficulties of parish life, present the young couple with many challenges to overcome. The tension grows when Henrick turns down a job offer with the royal palace in Stockholm in order to stay ministering to a small group of marginally interested people in the far north town of Forsboda. That, combined with innumerable other

pressures, causes Anna to leave Henrick. But they are later reunited, and he decides to take the post in Stockholm.

Throughout the movie the viewer is struck by the dedication of Henrick and Anna to the work of the ministry and to each other and their family. As with many Bergman films “The Best Intentions” stars the legendary Swedish actor Max von Sydow, who plays Anna’s

father. It also stars Pernilla August who later starred in two of the Star Wars prequels. (Why she would star those silly movies after being in this aesthetic gem is utterly beyond me... but I digress.) Watch this movie! You will not be disappointed. *“The Best Intentions” (Den goda viljin), 182 min., Swedish with English subtitles. ☩*

 PARISH NEWS & UPDATES: *Please note these important items!*
Prayer Book Society Meeting

Father Anderson will be away in February 12th - 14th for the board meeting of the Prayer Book Society. The Prayer Book Society seeks to promote the use of the classical prayer books of the Anglican Communion. Fr. Anderson serves on their board of directors.

Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper

Join us on Tuesday, February 17th at 6:30 p.m. for Evening Prayer and then our annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper. The supper is, as always, hosted by the men of the server’s guild. Fr. Anderson will be providing the mimosas as usual. We look forward to having you for this fun time!

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) ☩