

# The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

As some of you know this year, April 22nd, is the ten year anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. It has been interesting thinking back and reflecting on ten years of full time parish ministry. One of the things that I wonder the most about is whether or not my labor and ministry for God and his kingdom has made any palpable difference in people's lives. I venture to say that this is something most of God's ministers wonder from time to time. Perhaps it is our "results" oriented society that makes us ponder it. We wonder if we are "successful" or "in the right business" because X,Y, and Z is not happening; because we do not see conversion; because instead of great spiritual zeal we see lots of spiritual sloth. Well, as I have mentioned before, we are all ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ... it doesn't matter if we are in the lay or ordained state. Each one of us, by our baptism and confirmation, is a servant and steward of the Lord on some level. As I look around Saint Alban's I see so many people faithfully serving the Lord and ministering to others in his name! It is very inspiring to behold. As I see this I sometimes wonder if you all, the flock which the Lord has entrusted to my pastoral care, do not get discouraged in your work and ministry for God, just as those of us in the ordained state sometimes do. Perhaps you have reached out to help someone (friend, family, etc.), to lead him or her to a greater love of God, and to help that person with great spiritual and temporal needs, only to be rebuffed, or find that the person cares little for what you are trying to do. We've all been there. And we've all been tempted to throw in the towel and give up. But we shouldn't. The number one thing to keep in mind is that God calls us to be *faithful to him*... not necessarily "successful" as the world understands success. If we think about it, none of the prophets of the Old Testament were successful. They warned the people of Israel and Judah to repent of their sins and return to the Lord, yet most of the people ignored them, and eventually they were taken away captive and the Israel and Judah were destroyed by invading foreign armies. How's that for success? To the secularist mind the prophets were a bunch of failures. But to the believer they were not... because they were faithful to God. (God in fact told some of the prophets, such as Jeremiah, that they would be ignored, but ordered them to preach their message anyway!) God wants us to be faithful to him, which means finding and fulfilling the job or jobs he has given us to do, and letting him worry about the "results." If you are faithfully serving God and trying to be witness for our Lord Jesus Christ, sharing him and God's amazing love with others, and encouraging them to give their lives to God and follow Christ, don't give up. Be faithful. It is God who are you are serving, not man. He is the one that we should strive to please above all else.

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

*J. Gordon Anderson*

February 2016

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UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

**February 2nd - Purification**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**February 10th - Ash Wednesday**

Holy Communion at 12:00 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.

**February 17th - Ember Day**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**February 19th - Ember Day**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**February 20th - Ember Day**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**February 24th - St. Matthias**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Mar 20th - 26th - Holy Week**

Schedule TBA

**Mar 28th - Easter Monday**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Mar 29th - Easter Tuesday**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Apr 6th - Annunciation**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR: *Lent and Its Disciplines*

Lent is the annual forty day penitential season of the ecclesiastical year. It is a special time of prayer and fasting - a spiritual “workout” - meant to help us mortify the flesh and draw closer to God in preparation for Easter. While penitence and spiritual sobriety ought to mark every day of our lives as believers, there is nothing wrong with having a special season of the year where we focus especially on that endeavor.

In the ancient church the season of Lent was a time for catechumens (those preparing to enter the Church by baptism on Easter Even) to study the faith, confess their sins, and prepare in other ways for that momentous event whereby they would be grafted into Christ and made living members of his mystical body, the Church. It was not long before those who had already made the decision to follow Christ, been baptized and become Christians decided to use the same time of year as period to recommit themselves to Jesus and his Church through prayer and fasting. In the dark and middle ages, as Christianity spread throughout the world, and more and more people entered the Church in infant baptism, Lent came to be known as something more for believers who already had faith in Christ and were members of the Church than for unbelievers who were just learning to put their trust in Jesus and preparing to become Christians through entering the Church at baptism.

Here are some things that every Christian should make a special effort to do during the Lenten season in order to mortify the flesh and grow in God’s grace and holiness. Each of these disciplines are rooted in tradition and scripture and go back to the very beginnings of Church and the people of God. *Note: the rector is more than happy to answer any questions that you might have about these*

**Choose a Lenten discipline to follow.** Pick an activity to engage in that will challenge you, deepen your faith, and result in some positive spiritual change in your life. This could include: reading a good spiritual book; doing an intense study of scripture or increasing your scripture reading; praying the Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer daily or on specific days each week; volunteering somewhere; increasing your prayer time; etc. You can get creative! Just pick something and stick with it during Lent. We’ll know that we’ve chosen a good discipline if we emerge from Lent changed in some small way for the better.

**Make your confession.** One of the seven sacraments of the Church is the sacrament of penance. In this sacrament we privately confess our sins to God in the presence of a priest. The priest offers counsel and godly

advice and then pronounces absolution (forgiveness) of sin in the name of Jesus, in whose person he stands, and gives a small “penance” to be performed (usually a prayer to say). Everything said between the priest and penitent (the person making a confession) is kept completely confidential and not brought up outside of the sacrament to anyone - even the penitent! The value of private confession is that we are given godly advice and divine grace to avoid sin and grow in holiness. It is also very cathartic to confess our sins and failings to God and still be assured - verbally, and personally - that things are okay between us and God... he loves us and forgives us. That is something that we do not always get in the general confession and absolution in the Mass.

**Fast.** The forty days of Lent are days of fasting and abstinence (BCP p. li). During Lent we should try to eat no more than one large meal a day, and two smaller meals which together would make one large meal. We should also avoid snacking between meals. Furthermore, on Wednesdays and Fridays we should abstain from eating flesh meat, though seafood is traditionally permitted on these days. All of this is to show in part that “*Man does not live by bread alone.*” (Mt. 4:4) One of the ideas behind fasting is that if we can control the urges and pangs of our lower, bodily nature, then we will, by God’s grace, be more adept at controlling the passions and desires of the higher natures of intellect and spirit. Anyone familiar with the scriptures is well aware that fasting is a time honored discipline that has been practiced by God’s people for thousands of years. Jesus fasted, the spotless fasted, King David fasted, the Israelites fasted, and on and on. They fasted not to change God, who is changeless, but to change themselves with God’s help. We should do the same. If it was good enough for them, it is good enough for us.

**Give alms.** Donate to our Lenten appeal or give funds to another worthy cause. Just as fasting helps us fight the temptations of the flesh, and prayer the temptations of the devil, so giving alms helps us fight against the temptations of the world. When we are generous with the resources God has given to us we learn to be detached from the world and the vanities therein - fancy cars, “McMansions”, designer clothing, etc. This detachment gives us greater peace of mind and helps us put things in their proper perspective. One way to raise extra funds to give away is to take the money that we’d otherwise spend on on the thing from which we are fasting (e.g. Starbucks Lattes) and give it away as alms and offerings.

*Continued on page 4.*

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS: “*The Book of Common Prayer: A Biography*” and “*God’s Secretaries*”

It is winter! And what better way is there to pass the time on these dark, cold evenings then by curling up with a good book? What follows are some book recommendations of special interest to Anglicans that are not only entertaining and informative, but also highly edifying.

The first recommendation is a wonderful little book by Alan Jacobs called “*The Book of Common Prayer: A Biography*.” Jacobs is a professor of humanities at Baylor University. This small, 200 page volume published in 2013 is part of the “Lives of Great Religious Books” series by Princeton University Press. Highly accessible and easy to read, this book is the best volume published in recent years on the history of the Book of Common Prayer.

The author covers a remarkable amount of ground (pre-Reformation to contemporary times) in an incredibly short amount of space. The book is very well organized and flows quite easily from one era and topic to another. It is extremely well researched and balanced in its approach - the latter often being a rarity in Prayer Book studies. He cites many of the major books and studies on the Prayer Book and the Anglican tradition and brings them together in a book that is very interesting and almost as beautiful as the Prayer Book itself!

In the end he raises some interesting questions about the future of the Book of Common Prayer. As our use of books in general changes, what will that mean for bound, print editions of the Prayer Book? He also brings up practical and pastoral issues, such as whether or not the Prayer Book with its monolithic rites and ceremonies has an ability to reach people a world as broad and diverse as ours. Anyone who wants a good, solid, and accessible book to read on the history

and tradition of the Book of Common Prayer should read this fine volume.

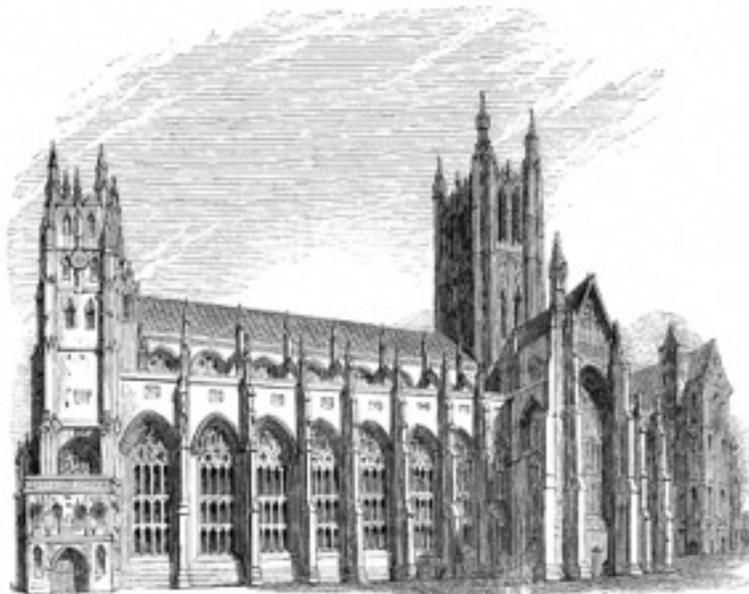
The second recommendation - related to the first - is “*God’s Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*.” by Adam Nicholson. While there have been numerous studies on the history of this Bible translation published in recent years (coinciding, as it were, with the 400th year since its original publication) this 250 page volume by Nicholson is probably the best all around book on the subject. The author is a journalist and travel writer, so the book reads like a great story.

This in contrast to other books on the subject written by theologians, which, while good, tend to be a bit dry and overly pedantic.

Along with the Book of Common Prayer, the King James Bible (published in 1611) has done more to form the modern English language than any other book or writing. Nicholson tells the riveting story of how this translation came into being... why it was commissioned, how the translation

process with all of its checks and balances (unrivaled even today) proceeded, and the its legacy. As with the Book of Common Prayer, the history of the King James Bible is intimately related to that of the English people, and the reader gets a healthy, but not overwhelming, dose of English history in order to better understand the dynamics and controversies at play.

There is no better way to appreciate the distinctive of our tradition than by reading and educating ourselves in them. These two books are excellent introductions to the defining liturgical books of the Anglican tradition. They may be read and appreciated by any intelligent person. If you have ever wanted to deepen your understanding and appreciation of these seminal books of our tradition check them out today! ✠



*Continued from page 2.*

**Related to fasting is “giving something up for Lent.”** This is a worthwhile endeavor. Each of us should pick something pleasurable that we enjoy from which to fast (it does not have to be food) and try to refrain from doing it, instead offering the time and resources that that thing takes up to God. If you are on Facebook all the time, for example, and would like to fast from that during Lent, use the time normally spent “Facebooking” for prayer or spiritual reading. Once in a while a priest hears that a person decided to “do” something in lieu of etc.). The problem that sometimes occurs with that, as one of my mentors once put it, is that the things we often choose to “do” for Lent are things that we are already supposed to be doing anyway! (“I am going to read the Bible each.” We’re

supposed to be doing that. “I am going to go to church every Sunday.” We’re supposed to be doing that. etc.) Years ago, my teenage middle sister gave my mom a similar sort of gift for Mother’s Day. She gave her a card with a note inside that said her gift to mom was going to be to “not argue with her” for a set amount of time. My father was rightly disgusted at the whole thing, not only because it was a lame attempt to avoid making a financial sacrifice to buy a real gift, but because kids are supposed to not argue with their parents anyway!

Lent is a special opportunity that we have once a year to really focus on our spiritual life and development. Let’s make an effort to make something of it so that we emerge from it on Easter Sunday a more devoted and godly people. ✠

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### SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY: *Bishop John Cosin on the Sacrament of Penance*

“The Church of England, howsoever it holdeth not Confession and Absolution Sacramental that is made unto and received from a Priest to be so absolutely necessary, as without it there can be no remission of sins, yet by this place (the Rubric urging Confession in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick) it is manifest what she teacheth concerning the virtue and force of this sacred action. The Confession is commanded to be special. The Absolution is the same that the ancient Church and the present Church of Rome useth. What would they more? Malonate, their greatest divine that I meet with, *de Paenit.*, p. 19, saith thus *Ego autum sic respondendum puto, non esse necesse, ut semper peccata remittantur per sacramentum penitentiae, sed ut ipsum sacramentum natura sua possit peccata remittere, si inveniatur peccata, et non inveniatur contrarium impedimentum.* And so much we acknowledge. Our “if he feel his conscience troubled” is no more than his *si inveniatur peccata*; for if he be not troubled with sin what needs either Confession or Absolution? Venial sins that separate not from the grace of God need not so much to trouble a man’s conscience; if he hath committed any mortal sin, then we require Confession of it to a priest, who may give him, upon his true contrition and repentance, the benefit of Absolution,



*Quantum in me est, et de jure possum, ego te absolvo;* not absolutely, lest the doctrine should get head, that some of their ignorant people believe, that be the party confessed never so void of contrition the very act of Absolution forgives him his sins. The truth is, that in the Priest’s Absolution there is the true power and virtue of forgiveness, which will most certainly take effect, *Nisi ponitur obex*, as in Baptism.”

[From the Notes appended to Nicholls’ *Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer: Cosin’s Works*, ed. L.A.C.T., Vol. V, pp 163 f.] Quoted from “Anglicanism: The Thought and Practice of the Church of England, Illustrated from the Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century” Compiled and Edited by Paul Elmer More and Frank Leslie Cross. (London, SPCK, 1957)

*JOHN COSIN (1594-1672) was Bishop of Durham. He was a very influential Restoration era churchman who greatly*

*influenced the revision of the Book of Common Prayer that resulted in the 1662 English Prayer Book. His translation of the ancient ordination hymn “Veni Creator Spiritus” came to be used in that Prayer Book and from there all other Prayer Books. ✠*