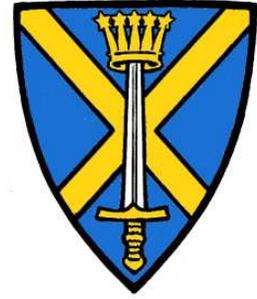


# The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Like most of America I was shocked and saddened when I learned that one of the icons of my childhood, comedian Bill Cosby, had been accused of drugging and raping multiple women over the years. He was later convicted of the charges and is currently doing time in jail. What a fall from grace. He is certainly a talented man. His comedic fame led to multiple television and movie deals. With the famous 1980's sitcom "The Cosby Show" and his subsequent activism for mentoring youth he came to be known as a top moral authority in America. Cosby eventually earned a doctorate in education, and on top of that many honorary degrees and awards from colleges and universities all over the country. But now all he's known for is being a rapist. Isn't it amazing how sin can seemingly wipe away and cancel out all of the good that a person has done and all of his accomplishments? That's how powerful it is! And that is one of the reasons that we want to avoid sin at all costs, and instead strive to live holy lives. Sin is very serious. It is willful rebellion against God's commandments and laws. Sin disrupts not only our own lives but the lives of everyone with whom we come into contact. Cosby's victims were probably not the only ones to suffer from his actions. The victim's families and friends were no doubt also negatively affected, and are probably still are today. Sin is like cancer. It spreads and spreads, eating up everything in its path. Since sin is a pattern of behavior one of the best ways to resist it and flee from it is to do good! The Decalogue (Ten Commandments) are the classic summary of God's law. We note that all of them but one ("Honor thy father and thy mother.") are negatives. "Do not murder; do not lie; do not steal; do not be an idolator, do not commit adultery," and so on. Have we ever thought of turning these negatives into positives? "Love other people, especially your enemy; speak good positive words of encouragement; be generous and give to those in need and to God's work; honor God in word and deed; treat others with dignity and respect," etc. All of that is to say that perhaps the best defense against sin is a good offense! Maybe the best way to avoid it is to do the opposite of it. God of course is there to help us in the battle to live holy lives. His Holy Spirit indwells us and gives us strength to flee from evil and do good. Sin is very dangerous. Let us do all we can to avoid it and strive to live "godly, righteous and sober lives" to glory of almighty God. (BCP, p. 6)

Faithfully, your priest, *J. Gordon Anderson*

February 2019

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UPCOMING SERVICES:

**Feb 2nd - Purification of St. Mary the Virgin**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Feb 25th - St. Matthias**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Mar 6th - Ash Wednesday**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.

**Mar 13th, 15th, and 16th - Lenten Ember Days**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Mar 25th - Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Apr 14th-20th - Holy Week**

Schedule to be announced

**Apr. 22nd - Easter Monday**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Apr. 23rd - Easter Tuesday**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Apr. 25th - St. Mark**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

THEOLOGY: *The Blessing of Objects*

In the last few months we have seen numerous objects blessed in church services. On the First Sunday in Advent the Advent Wreath was blessed. On the Fourth Sunday in Advent the Christmas Creche was blessed. On Epiphany Sunday gold, frankincense, and myrrh was blessed, and chalk was too. On Candlemas (The Purification of St. Mary the Virgin) we bless candles. On February 3rd, The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany and the feast of St. Blasius, throats were blessed. And throughout the Epiphany season we have had Epiphany house blessings. All of this is not the end. For as the days, weeks, and months go on we will bless incense, ashes, palms, water, people, and many other objects. Sometimes, as with the above, these blessings occur during the liturgy. Other times they occur outside of the liturgy, such as when we bless vestments, books, pictures, crosses, and many other things. What does it mean to bless objects, why does the Church do it, and what should our attitude be with regard to them?

There are several different ways to think about the blessing of things. Perhaps the key concept to understand is that when an object is blessed it is set apart and consecrated for sacred use. It becomes special. The blessed object becomes a *sacramental* which is an object used to help us grow in faith and in love of God. They serve as powerful reminders of some aspect of God's character, what he has done in our life, what he is calling us to become, and so forth.

This is rooted in what is called the "sacramental principle," which teaches that God communicates his grace to us —his very life and all of his blessings— through physical means. Why does he do this? Because we are physical beings. This is precisely why God became a man in the Person of Jesus. Some theologians in fact have referred to Jesus as "the primordial sacrament."

Well just as God communicates his grace to us through the sacraments, which are extensions of the incarnation, so in a similar way he moves our hearts and minds to him through these blessed objects. They do not convey grace in the sense that the sacraments do. And neither are they "magical talismans" with imbued with arcane, mystical

properties. They are simple, manmade objects "set apart" and used in a unique way to open our hearts and minds up to God and what he is doing and is going to do in our lives.

Even though blessed objects are not magical charms they should never be treated callously or put to profane use. A blessed chalice, for example, is for *ritual* use —the celebration of the Holy Eucharist— not *beverage* use, i.e. for drinking coffee, tea, and the like. Likewise, blessed palms from Palm Sunday are to be kept on display throughout the year to remind us of our Lord's passion and death that first Holy Week. They should not be thrown away after church. We save them so we can serve as symbols to us, and also so we can bring them back to church so they can be burned into ashes to be placed on our foreheads the following Ash Wednesday. What a powerful reminder of how, on one hand, we welcome the Lord with joyous enthusiasm to be our Redeemer, but then, on the other, how we utterly fail at following him as Lord, and so we repent of our sin in dust and ashes at the beginning of Lent!

Obviously, because sacramentals are *physical* objects whose effects are meant for *this* life they will deteriorate over time. Rosaries will break apart, vestments will fray. Holy Water will get bugs in it. Candles will become too short and stubby to be used. And all other sacramentals will fade and wither with age. They do have to be retired at some point, there is no doubt about that. But the key is —because they are blessed— there is a proper way of disposing of them that is unique to their nature. Many times blessed objects that have deteriorated beyond use are burned. Other times, if they are liquid (e.g. water, oil, etc.) they are poured into the earth. Sometimes larger objects are buried. (I am told that former rector Fr. Unterburger was in the habit of burying old Paschal Candles in the churchyard! Hopefully they will not accidentally be exhumed when we begin our building project!).

If you have a special object —a cross, a picture, etc.— that you'd like to have blessed please see the rector and he'll let you know if it is possible. In most cases the answer is yes. The Church will do whatever she can to help God's people be mindful of him and what he is doing in our lives! ✠

SEMINARIAN UPDATE: *Mr. Waldhauser's Advent Embertide Letter to Bishop Grundorf*

Happy Embertide and happy Advent! Thank you for your email yesterday, for your permission to do this internship at St. Matthew's and for your willingness to continue supporting me toward the cost of this upcoming semester. I am very excited for the year ahead.

I just finished my finals and feel good about how they went. I had a twelve-page paper on the view of salvation presented in the *Didache* which was fun to write. The most intense final was the one for New Testament, which involved a written portion, an exam on the contents of the 89 chapters of the Gospels, and an oral portion, to discuss the philosophical problems of the quest for the historical Jesus and the differences between the Synoptics and John. That was one of those courses that felt like a game-changer in my life, because it helped me get more in tune with Christ's life as not just being historical, but also as containing meaning, with slightly different interpretative emphases by the four Evangelists. As I look toward the semester ahead, I find myself most excited about a reading course which I'll be doing: a one-on-one study with my favorite professor on the Carmelite mystics, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross.

It will be good to have more time with mystical theology, because I want to make sense of some realizations I had in prayer this past semester. Beginning in October, I have felt like I've been experiencing a spiritual breakthrough. All of junior year, I felt like I was searching for God, trying to find him, desiring to become one with him, but unsure of how to get there, besides "love" as the ambiguous textbook answer. But I was wondering how it was I thought I'd end up "finding" him, and I realized that I was looking primarily for intellectual fulfillment: and I realized that this need to take hold of God by means of the intellect was the very thing which caused me to feel separate from him in the first place.

The intellect connects us with ideas about God: concepts, abstractions, thoughts – and God is none of those things, because he's not a thought, he's not an idea, he's not an abstraction. He's reality itself, and so ideas can never perfectly get in

touch with him. So I realized that I would never be able to "find" him in the mind, because he transcends it; and so in giving up the "search," I realized that what I was left over with when the ideas about God fall away is the direct experience of God. It felt like all the walls of the mind that had separated me from him in the first place fell down, and I felt complete freedom and grace. I *felt* that it was in him that I live, move, and have my being, and it was mind that was causing me to conceive of myself as distant from him in the first place. Since then I have felt a kind of spontaneous attitude which has so far caused most everything to feel like it is just as it should be.

Thanks for the opportunity for me to vocalize these things. It is very helpful to process all this through, and this is the most exciting thing which I have to update you on since I wrote you last.

Each night at Evensong, the House remembers a particular bishop in our corporate prayers and your own name was the one that was read. I remember you in my private prayers as well and hope that this Christmas brings you all joy and peace in believing. Looking forward to the time together at the winter conference. See you then! Thanks for having me as your seminarian.

Sincerely,

Mason Waldhauser

*Ed. Note: According to the canons of the Church each postulant for Holy Orders has to write to the bishop and give him updates on his progress and preparation for ordination. It is customary to do this during the four Ember Seasons of ecclesiastical year. These four seasons, which occur during Advent, Lent, Whitsuntide (Pentecost), and Trinitytide (during the autumn) were times when ordinations were often held in the ancient Church, specifically in Rome. We still observe these days in our 1928 Prayer Book calendar, and often have ordinations on these days, though we also have them on other days as well. In the propers for the Ember Days in the Book of Common Prayer we ask God to put it into the hearts of many to offer themselves for the sacred ministry of the Church. ☩*

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

### **Building Project Update**

As of the date of this writing we have raised \$6550 towards phase one of our building project. This phase involves have percolation testing done and an analysis of how large of septic reserve areas are needed under the current standards, and get the building envelope nailed down. Initially the vestry thought the cost for phase one would be \$10,000. At their January meeting the vestry agreed to proceed with this phase and engage a local site engineer once half the money was raised. Thanks to some generous contributions from the community we are able to proceed. So in the next few weeks a local site engineer will come out to do the required testing. And as an added bonus, he really took care of us and will only be charging us \$2,500 for the work! This leaves extra money for the later phases of the project. Thanks be to God for his gracious provision!

### **Update on Fr. Don Sackett**

Former parishioner Fr. Donald Sackett is now a priest in the Diocese of Quincy, Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). He was recently nominated to succeed the Rt. Rev'd Jack Iker as Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Worth, formerly of the Episcopal Church but now part of the ACNA. Although he did not make it past the first round of selections it was a tremendous honor both for him and for St. Alban's —as we sponsored him for ordination in the first place— to be nominated.

### **Scotch Whiskey Building Fundraiser**

Save the Date! On Sunday March 3rd 2019 join the church for an open house with whiskey tasting at the Tillinghast's from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. This event probably should be called 'Save Steve', because by accepting a self-imposed challenge of collecting a full set of Game of Thrones whiskey, he has successfully answered the challenge and amassed a significant array of fine single malt whiskeys... a not insignificant burden for a non-whiskey drinker! Wine and non-alcoholic beverages will also be served as well as finger foods which appropriately pair with whiskey and wine. A free will donation basket will be available to support the church

building fund. Please join us for an afternoon of fellowship and fun... and really good whiskey! Winter is here! RSVP to Steve and Linda.

### **Shrove Tuesday Cajun Dinner Night**

Come on out on Tuesday, March 5th at 6:30 p.m. for Evening Prayer followed by our annual Shrove Tuesday cajun themed potluck dinner. This is always a great time with music and fantastic food and fellowship. Invite a friend! It's a great way to introduce people to our parish family.

### **Lent 2019**

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday which falls on March 6th this year. There will be two services of Holy Communion that day with the Imposition of Ashes. Our devotions and activities will remain much the same as always. On Tuesdays during Lent (except the 2nd of each month, when "Grace, Grit, and Thanksgiving" meets) we will have Evening Prayer followed by a dinner and a study on the seven sacraments. Then on Fridays we will have Stations of the Cross and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at 12:00 p.m. The usual Prayer Book Holy Days services that fall during Lent will be observed on their specific days.

### **2019 Episcopal Visit and Confirmations**

On Sunday, March 17th, the Second Sunday in Lent, our suffragan bishop, the Rt. Rev'd Chandler Holder Jones, SSC (a former rector of this parish!) will be here to celebrate the Holy Communion, administer the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, and receive new members. We will have a record number of people this year! Thanks be to God. Be sure to come out and welcome Bishop Jones. He is one of the nicest, and godliest men you'll ever meet, and he is bar none one of the best preachers out there. You won't want to miss his visit. ☩