

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

A couple of months ago I was given a copy of a newsletter from an Episcopalian parish in Baltimore County. In her column the rector made the rather startling statement that, unlike Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans do not observe saints days. It was a very strange thing to write, I thought, because all one has to do is look at the Book of Common Prayer (either the old edition that we use or the newer edition that the Episcopal Church uses) to see that there are a number of Holy Days dedicated to the saints! On pages l and li of the 1928 Prayer Book we see "*A Table of Feasts (and Fasts) To Be Observed In This Church Throughout The Year.*" These tables contain the official Holy Days of the Church which I advertise as "Prayer Book Holy Days" during announcement time. There are actually even more Holy Days than these which we may observe, but these are the bare minimum ones that each parish should try to observe. The proper Collect, Epistle, and Gospel for most of these Holy Days begin on p. 226 in the Prayer Book. As everyone at St. Alban's should know by now, we try to observe these feasts on the days that they fall rather than transferring them to the nearest Sunday. We usually celebrate them at 10:00 a.m. *I want to see more people come out to these services!* There are plenty of us (retired folk, people with flexible work schedules, etc.) who can make these quiet, contemplative services from time to time. We almost always read the first part of Morning Prayer with these services, so you not only get in a weekday Mass when you attend but also your morning Daily Office, with its Psalms, Old Testament lesson, and canticles. As there are typically no more than two Holy Days services per month it would hardly be an imposition on anyone's time to show up and worship the Lord at these special services. It might actually do us some spiritual good and be a great offering of yourself that you can make to God! There are two misconceptions about these services that I want to clear up: first, we do not collect an offering at them, so you do not have to bring any money with you. Second, these will be celebrated no matter what. It doesn't matter if only one or two people show up because the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is first and foremost an offering to God. The answer to the question that I am sometimes asked by a lone parishioner who takes time out of his or her schedule to worship God at one of these Holy Day Masses, "Would you still have the service if I didn't show up?", is a resounding, "Yes!" Because the Holy Eucharist is our offering to God in union with our Lord Jesus Christ. We worship the Father by offering him the Body and Blood of his Son in union with all of the saints of the Church, known and unknown. The Mass is going to be offered no matter what, so why not come and join in the offering? In 2015 make it a point to come to these Prayer Book Holy Days services as they are offered. For you will find that this time spent with God pays off in many ways, both in this life and the next!

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

J. Gordon Anderson

January 2015

IN THIS ISSUE:

Spirituality, p. 2

Praying the Psalms

Liturgy & Worship, p. 3

The Last Gospel

Parish News & Updates, p. 3

Important updates from St. Alban's

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

January 1st - Circumcision

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

January 6th - Epiphany

Holy Communion at 6:30 p.m.

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.

SPIRITUALITY: *Praying the Psalms*

Prayer is at once one of the simplest and most complex of spiritual practices. On the one hand it seems so easy: just open your mouth and talk to God. Pour your heart out to him, praise him, ask him for help, and so on. To make it even easier we can pray wherever we are (though to be sure some places and times are more conducive to prayer than others). And to make matters even easier if we are ever at a loss for words we can read prayers that were composed by another as in our glorious Book of Common Prayer. So prayer, on one hand, seems like an easy thing to do.

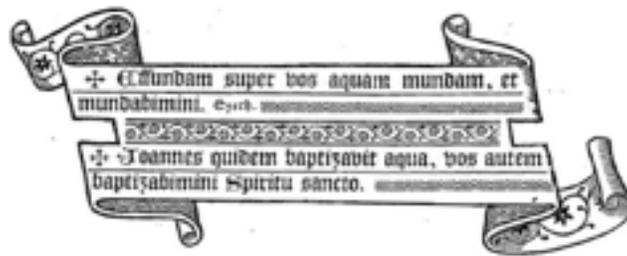
But on the other hand prayer can seem so difficult at times. What can we possibly say to God? How do we pour our hearts out to him? Sometimes when we try to talk to God we are at a loss for words, or find it difficult to express what we are feeling and thinking. (Just as that can happen when talking with people, so it can happen when talking to God.) As for written prayers like the ones in the Prayer Book, they often seem too brief and formal to express how we are feeling. What are we to do?

One of the most overlooked resources for prayer are the Psalms of David. When we are at a loss for words before almighty God we can make these beautiful poems our prayers.

The word *Psalm* comes from the Greek word *Psalmoi* which means “songs accompanied by string music.” Because they were originally songs they served as the hymnal of the Jewish people. Later they naturally became the hymnal of Christ’s One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church because the Church came out of the synagogues. Churches today -

including St. Alban’s - still sing the Psalms. The Psalter, which is another name for the book of Psalms, is found on pp. 345-525 in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer. In the Bible it is found in the Old Testament where it forms part of the collection of books called the “wisdom literature.”

Chances are if you open up your bible as near to the middle as possible you will open up in the book of Psalms. The longest book in the bible, the Psalms are historically attributed to King David, but modern scholarship would identify other authors as well,



including Solomon, Moses, and other anonymous folk.

What we can do in our daily devotional time is use the Psalms to help us pray. *We can in fact make them our prayers. If you never have a prayer time during the day because you don't know what to say or where to begin open up your Prayer Book or Bible to the Psalms and start reading. As you read, imagine yourself as the one who is writing the Psalm! Make his words your words. Think about what he is writing in relation to what is going on in your own life.*

Now we might look at some of the Psalms and say, “Well, that sure doesn’t sound like a prayer to me.” Psalm 1, for example, doesn’t really contain any sort of petition to God. The same goes for many other Psalms. *But we must remember that prayer is really - when it's all boiled down - a type of communion and fellowship with God! When we pray we not only ask him for things (Psalm 16), but we also confess our*

sins (Psalm 51), praise God (Psalm 150), declare his glory (Psalm 24), and so on. Prayer is communion and fellowship with God, and when we spend time with him we confess our sins, ask him to meet our needs, praise his glorious name, declare his glory, and more!

The one thing about praying the Psalms is this: you need to actually mouth the words with your lips or say the words out loud. Praying in our minds is not always the best way to pray because, if we think about it, we “read” so many things to ourselves - even things that we disagree with and find repugnant - on any given day. But the object of reading the Psalms is to make them our *prayers* - make them our *intention*... their words *our* words, and we do so in part by deliberately “mouthing” the words with our lips. We pray, after all, “O Lord, open thou our *lips*.” (Psalm

51:15)

If you are leery about just diving into the Psalms and starting to read them as prayers fear not! There is a guide that we may use on p. ix in the Prayer Book. This “Selection of Psalms” has a many of them sorted out into categories such as *Worship, God's mercy, Penitential Psalms, Peace, Trust in God, God our Refuge*, and more. You can use this as a guide to how to read the Psalms and make them into your prayers.

So if you want to pray to God, and pour out your heart and soul to him who is your creator and redeemer, but find yourself at a loss for words, try using the Psalms. Make the words of the Psalter *your words*. The scriptures are the divinely inspired word of God! One cannot go wrong by speaking God’s words back to him. And we will find when we do so just how much they speak to us at the same time. ☩

LITURGY & WORSHIP: *The Last Gospel and the Doctrine of the Incarnation*

At certain Masses we hear the so-called “Last Gospel” at the end of the service, immediately before the recessional hymn. It consists almost invariably of the prologue of St. John’s Gospel (John 1:1-14), which is the first Gospel reading for Christmas in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP pp. 97-98).

The Last Gospel is an important weekly reminder of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. This doctrine teaches that the eternal Word of God, or Son of God, became flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. According to the early church father St. Athanasius it was through this glorious and mysterious event that God began the process of recreating the world which had fallen into sin because of Adam.

While the doctrine of the incarnation shows that man is fallen and in need of salvation it also shows that the created order, as God originally intended it, is good and worth being redeemed. That God could take on human flesh shows that flesh itself is not opposed to holiness and goodness. Put another way, if flesh and the world were inimical to God’s divine goodness then there is no way that he would have become a human being! But God did become a man in Jesus Christ. St. John, in fact, goes to great lengths in the prologue of his Gospel and in the first chapter of his first epistle to explain that Jesus became a real, living, breathing human being.

It is just as important for the Church to remember this truth today as it was for her to remember it back in St. John’s day. The spirit of gnosticism, which teaches, among other things, that matter - including flesh - is inconsequential and even evil, is alive and well. Just as St. John and the early apostolic Fathers fought this heresy, so must the Church challenge it today. We see the spirit of gnosticism moving in our culture in a variety of ways. In the secular world, for example, we see that many people now perceive their sex to be whatever they think or wish it to be rather than what nature, biology, and hard science says it is. And in the Christian world we find that many people - instead of wishing to be God’s instruments to redeem the world and make it a better place - instead dream of fleeing it and going to heaven in the “rapture” all because it is so evil! We can probably think of many other examples of how the spirit of gnosticism, which says that matter is evil, pervades our culture.



In contrast to this the Church has always taught that matter is not evil in itself. Moreover, the material aspect of our being as God made it, though fallen, is good, and is indeed a vital and important part of who we are. And so the Last Gospel, which constantly recalls the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, has a very important role to play in the liturgy and life of the Church today because it reminds us that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” and in so doing it reminds us that our flesh, and the material aspect of creation, though in need of redemption and restoration, is fundamentally a good thing.

As for the “Last Gospel” itself it has an eventful and interesting history. According to Joseph Jungmann, S.J. in his monumental study of the history of the liturgy *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, it is rightly understood as a summary of the entire Gospel message. The prologue of St. John’s Gospel as used in the devotion of the Church in the west can be traced back to at least the 11th century. It was held in high regard in the Middle Ages and was especially looked forward to when it was read at daily and special services in parts of Europe. It was also read before the administration of “Last Rites,” at baptisms, and even used as a blessing for good weather! After Mass in certain places it was occasionally recited as a type of final blessing. Its regular liturgical use came a bit later. The reading of it after Mass began as early as the 13th century with the Dominican order, a popular religious order of the western Church. In those days it was a private devotion of the priest which he said after celebrating the Holy Eucharist. Eventually it came to be said publicly, and later on down the road it became enshrined in the official liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. Some Anglicans of the “Anglo-Catholic” movement began including the Last Gospel into the English liturgy in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Most Roman and Anglican parishes today no longer read the Last Gospel. It, along with many other parts of the old liturgies, have since the 1960’s been consigned to the dustheap of history. But we must ask ourselves this important question: haven’t we lost something by not constantly hearing this reminder of the incarnation of the Word of God? Maybe if we more people grew up hearing this passage the world would become a better place because people would see it as good and redeemed by Christ, and not as something evil to be eschewed. ✠

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

Annual Epiphany Dinner and Gift Exchange:

Join us on Tuesday, January 6th at 6:30 p.m. for our Epiphany service and followed by a potluck dinner and our always fun and exciting gift giveaway! Be sure to bring a small gift to exchange. We will also have drawing for the gorgeous quilt made by Tammy Jones!

Diocesan Clergy Conference

Father Anderson will be away January 28th - 30th for the annual diocesan clergy conference. He will be available by phone, e-mail, or text messaging in case of emergencies.

Annual Servers Guild Meeting:

On Sunday, January 25th the servers guild will have its annual meeting after the 10:00 a.m. service. All altar servers please plan on attending this meeting.

January Vestry Meeting:

The vestry will meet on Wednesday, January 21st at 7:00 p.m. at the church.

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 6:00 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!

Thank you...

To everyone who gave to the church in 2014 and who pledged for 2015. In particular we thank those who gave and pledged sacrificially for the church. St. Alban's does not have an endowment and we receive no support from the diocese or any other entity. We are funded entirely by your generosity. Please remember that St. Alban's cannot survive on a "tip" of \$5 - \$10/week. May God bless you for your kindness and your sacrificial giving.

New Tuesday Night Study in February

Our Tuesday evening service of Evening Prayer, dinner, and adult formation will resume in February. We will be looking at Islam and studying it from a historical and Christian perspective. If you want to get a better understanding of this religion, especially as it relates to the Christian religion, and which we hear about in the news so much these days, the please plan on joining us for this fascinating, yet non-polemical study of one of the major religions of the world.



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) ✠