

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

If you look at the parish website you will notice on the opening page the following statement: "St. Alban's is a *Christ-centered* parish..." Have you ever wondered what this means? What does it mean for a person and church to be Christ-centered? All we have to do is think about what "center" means to get the idea behind this phrase. Here are some of the meanings the dictionary gives for center: *it is the point around which everything else is formed. It is the pivot or axis of rotation. It is the core of something. It is the point from which activity is directed.* So being *Christ-centered* means that *Jesus Christ* is the center point around which our whole life is formed. It means that Jesus Christ guides every aspect of our life. It means that Jesus Christ is the anchor and core of our being. Those are just a few examples of what it means to be Christ-centered. That St. Alban's is centered on Jesus Christ means among other things that His message of salvation is preached from the pulpit and taught and discussed in the various forums and studies. His paschal mystery is celebrated at every liturgy in the sacrifice of the Mass. His healing and reconciliation is brought to the larger community through our various ministries. In other words, *Jesus Christ* is what this parish is about. Our mission is to worship and glorify him, and proclaim his Gospel through traditional worship and compassionate service. *But Jesus can't be the center of St. Alban's Church if he is not the center of your life and mine.* Do we form our lives around God and Christ? Is Jesus the guiding point and stabilizing anchor of our hearts and minds? Or does some other philosophy or concern influence and guide everything that we say, think, and do? Since we are Christians Jesus Christ should be the absolute core of our being, and we should try to follow his example of life, and, through prayer, devotion, worship, and service to others, live in fellowship and communion with him. The Christian whose life is not anchored on Jesus is like a ship that is tossed about in a raging sea. The storms of life come and wreck the ship. But the person whose life is centered on Jesus Christ is like a ship with a heavy anchor. It may get battered a bit, but ultimately it weathers the storm and does not get lost at sea because it is *anchored*. Jesus is our anchor. May we make him the center of our lives. And may St. Alban's always be known as a truly Christ-centered parish.

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

J. Gordon Anderson

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UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

July 4th - Independence Day

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

July 25th - St. James

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

August 6th - Transfiguration

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

August 22nd - St. Bartholomew (trans.)

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

September 18th - Ember Day

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

September 23rd - St. Matthew (trans.)

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

October 17th - St. Luke (trans)

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!

THEOLOGY: *Many ancient heresies are alive and well today, and manifest themselves in surprising ways.*

In every age the Church finds it necessary to address certain beliefs and teachings that she deems to be false, and therefore dangerous to man. Usually it was at councils and synods where these issues were debated and discussed, and where the Church, guided by the Holy Ghost, clarified and defined her beliefs. The right belief of the Church came to be known as *orthodoxy* while the incorrect, heretical belief came to be known as *heterodoxy*.

Most of the ancient heresies that the Church had to think about and pronounce judgment on had to do with the person of Jesus Christ. One such heresy was called *docetism*. This was the belief that Jesus Christ only *appeared* to be a human being. The name of the heresy, docetism, in fact means *illusion* or *phantasm*. The Church condemned docetism at the first ecumenical council, the Council of Nicea, in 325 A.D.

One of the reasons the Church condemned this teaching is because it subtly assumes that fleshly existence is by nature evil. Since the docetists believed that enfleshed existence is inherently evil they reasoned that there was no way that the Son of God would have become an actual living, breathing human being in Jesus Christ! The Church rightfully condemned this belief in part because if Jesus Christ was not true man then he could not redeem the human race from sin and death.

Today, though it might not be readily apparent to us, various aspects of the docetic heresy are alive and well. *We see this especially in the idea that there is nothing important or special about our enfleshed existence and our physical, human nature.* Many progressive thinkers and cultural commentators either directly or indirectly assert that our physical nature doesn't matter to us, and really isn't even a part of who we are.

All of this manifests itself in the bizarre and tragic events that play out on the evening news and in tabloid magazines. A man becomes grossly obese, not caring about his body to point that he cannot even get out of bed in the morning because he is too overweight. A woman decides that despite being born female she is *really*, deep down inside, a male, and so she has a "sex change" operation. Or two men or two women who are in a romantic relationship decide to raise children together because the only thing that matters with regard to rearing children is

that they are in a home with love... not that they are in a home with their father and mother. Other developments coming down the pipeline are chilling to consider, such as incorporating machines and computers *into* people to "enhance" them in various ways! *The assumption behind all of this is that our natural, god-given physical nature has little to nothing to do with who we really are, or consider ourselves to be.* Or to put it bluntly, our bodies and physical distinctions don't matter with regard to anything at all! If we think about it there is a very small step between this contemporary notion that our fleshly existence is essentially unimportant and the docetic idea that it is altogether evil.

But the Church has always taught that enfleshed existence is ordained by God, and good and holy, though indeed fallen and in need of redemption in Christ. The creation stories in Genesis teach that God created man "male and female." They, along with everything else God created, were pronounced *good* by God the Father. So not only is enfleshed existence something good and holy, the *distinctive physical aspects* of our being that make us who we are, such as hair color, build, sex, and more, are also by extension good and holy.

As with everything that the Church teaches, the latest biological and scientific insights confirm the truth of this. Study after study shows that the biological differences between men and women are real, and cause us to think and act in different ways that are very important for the well-being of family and society. Likewise our physical well-being affects our spiritual well-being: if we live a grossly unhealthy lifestyle our spirit and outlook on life usually suffers as well.

In short, our bodies matter. They are sacred, holy, and a constituent element of who we are. Regardless of how hard postmodern man tries to imagine that his physical nature and being is inconsequential, or something that he can define himself, the hard reality of science compels him to believe otherwise. The Church today needs to stand against any docetic error that downplays the importance and significance of the body and human nature, and boldly speak the truth of the Gospel (and science, in fact) in a spirit of love and compassion. ✠

PARISH LIFE: *A Mid-Year Update From The Rector*

Since we are a little more than halfway through the year I thought it would be appropriate to give an update on the state of the parish.

Attendance has been good. The ASA (average Sunday attendance) is between 55-60. This is what it has been for a number of years only with some different faces. While on the surface that might not sound like great news, the positive thing is that we have the same ASA as in past *but with less services*. As we all know, we consolidated some of our Sunday services this past Advent. *In the process we lost no one*. That is a big accomplishment.

Overall the new worship schedule has been working out great for us. Everyone has commented on how much more alive the services are, and how much better the singing and participation has been since we combined the 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. services. Additionally, our choir is back in action, singing regularly for services, and we have many ministry volunteers serving at the altar and ministering in other capacities.

In terms of fellowship activities we have had a number of fun dinners this year as usual, though less than in the past. We missed out St. Alban Day dinner this year because of two things: 1) the rector got the feast day mixed up with another one (For some reason I thought St. Alban fell in August!), and 2) no one planned a meal. Lord willing, we will have a dinner on our feast of title next year, as is our (typical) custom.

Beyond that what we are aiming to do in terms of dinners is have one per quarter to coincide with a principal Holy Day. Honestly, we can have as many dinners as we want, whenever we want, so long as someone wants to plan and organize it! The Tillinghasts planned a wonderful dinner in honor of Susan Dorsett. Anyone is welcome to do such a thing at St. Alban's Church.

The lack of participation in weekday spiritual growth activities, such as Prayer Book Holy day services, Prayer Group, Bible Study, and Tuesday evening services, as well as special principal Holy Day services, is not good. It is even appalling at times. The attendance at this year's Holy Week services was extremely poor. Quite frankly, we should be embarrassed by our lack of zeal in this area. Don't we want to grow in knowledge of our faith, and deepen our relationship with God by coming to these extra services and activities? I encourage everyone to come out for these important and spiritually refreshing events.

Note that just because you come on one week doesn't mean that you can never take a break, or bow out once in a while! You won't get "trapped" into coming every single week if you show up every now and then. These activities will continue to be offered in hopes that more and more people, realizing how much God has done for them, will take time to deepen their faith and worship him with their fellow believers from time to time during the week.

Now that I am done with my unseemly outburst about extracurricular activities I can move on to another important matter. Our major challenge at this point is the building. We have had to spend copious amounts of money recently to have much-needed work done on our aging building. In recent months a lot of plumbing and electrical repairs have been done. We had to pay about \$500 for parts for our well and pump which had completely corroded (this is why our water was brown). Recently we had to have the air conditioner for the parish hall serviced twice in as many weeks. And we were informed that it is probably going to die in just a few years and we should start saving up for a new one! Additionally, our furnace had to be completely cleaned and serviced, as it had been perhaps 10 years since that was last done. On top of all of this we have had our usual problems with the basement flooding.

Many thanks goes out to the junior warden, Rich Burt, for staying on top of all of this and getting the work done on these items. He did much of the labor himself! Thank you so much, Rich!

But what are we to think about all of this? Much of it, such as servicing the units, and replacing old, corroded pumps and such, is regular, routine maintenance with which any organization must deal. Others are not - namely, the *basement*.

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To put it bluntly, the basement is an albatross. As many people know, when the parish hall addition was added years ago the basement was not done up to code. On top of this, it appears to have been dug too deep, which is one of the reasons that it floods. *The basement is now a major obstacle to the growth of our church.* We cannot make any structural changes to the church building without first addressing the “basement problem.” In other words, if we want to make more seating in the nave by doing some structural changes we would first have to get the basement up to code! All of our money would be used up to bring a useless albatross up to code, for a

building that is too small and built on land that we do not own!

Everything hinges on the basement, which is not just an obstacle to our ministry, but also a threat to our very existence. How is this so? Because if we cannot get more people into the church we will die. (See the April 2013 issue of *The Centurion* for an article about this.) And we cannot get more people in unless we build and expand. But we can't do that unless we deal with the basement problem. So we need to come up with a plan to address the basement problem in the next couple of years.

Therefore the vestry is at the early stages of looking into a solution that will solve the basement problem and at the

same time allow us to modestly expand the nave so as to allow more people to fit in the church on Sunday mornings. If we can successfully implement such a plan we will have the room to continue to grow and prosper. Once we grow some more, we can begin to seriously consider whatever next step the Lord has in mind for us. In the next few weeks and months we will be gathering information to present to the parish so we can chart a path forward. Please keep the church and vestry in your prayers as these weighty matters are considered.

May God continue to bless us as we go forward for his glory and honor, and thank you all for your love and service for him! ✠ JGA+

SACRED SCRIPTURE: *Circumcision in the Bible*

It's a common and simple surgical procedure today, done for reasons of hygiene. In Bible times it was more: a visible sign to the people of Israel that they were God's chosen people. The Bible traces the practice to Abraham, the ancestor of the Hebrews/Jews. According to Genesis 17, God commanded Abraham that every male child be circumcised when eight days old - a practice Jews still observe. Many nations besides Israel practiced circumcision, but only Israel gave it a spiritual significance. The warlike Philistines, a constant thorn in Israel's side, were notorious for not practicing circumcision, and the Old Testament refers to them as “the uncircumcised.”

Later in the Old Testament, the prophets warned that outward signs of religion were not enough: A person's heart had to be right with God and with others. More than one of the prophets spoke of the necessity of being circumcised “inside” - not just the physical operation, but the more important change of the heart turning to God. The prophet Jeremiah told the people to “circumcise your hearts.”

A change occurred with Christianity. All the first Christians were Jews, as was Jesus, but the faith began to spread to non-Jews, many of whom were not circumcised. A question arose among Christians: Must males be circumcised in order to be Christians? There was a danger of a split in the Christian community, but a counsel in Jerusalem (Acts 15) decided that, no, circumcision was not a requirement for Christians. The apostle Paul took a great interest in this discussion, since he was spreading the faith to non-Jews. Writing to Christians in Rome, he said that “circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit” (Rom. 2:29). This was a crucial decision: It meant that Christianity was a religion in its own right, not just a kind of “wing” of the Jewish religion.

Muslims (who, like the Jews, consider themselves “children of Abraham”) also practice circumcision. ✠

Quoted from “1,001 Things You Always Wanted to Know About the Bible But Never Thought to Ask” by J. Stephen Lang. (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999)