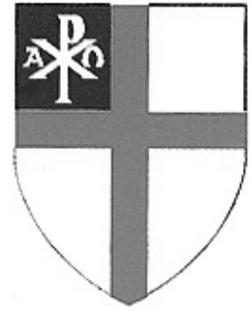


The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

It can certainly be depressing to watch the news these days. It seems that every time we turn on the TV or the radio all we hear about is some awful tragedy: a mass shooting; a gruesome murder; a crooked business deal that has ruined lives; lawsuits and threats of lawsuits; and etc. One wonders if the world is actually becoming worse or (more likely) if it's always been this bad but we just didn't know it! Maybe the news organizations focus on these stories because they mean bigger ratings. Who knows. What are we to do when we get distressed at the state of the world? In Philippians 4:8 Saint Paul writes, "*Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*" This is sound advice because at its heart it is an invitation to spend time with the Lord. When we step into his presence and deliberately and intentionally seek him the troubles of the world and the anxieties they cause are put into a new and better perspective. Now, that does not mean that the clock has turned back so that the awful thing never happened; and it doesn't mean there is no more pain and uncertainty. Thinking on heavenly things doesn't mean checking our brains at the door and pretending to live in a land of unicorns and butterflies. No, to step into God's presence and focus our hearts and minds on that which is true, beautiful, and good is to *acknowledge* the brokenness of the world and our lives. That is why we are turning to God in the first place! But when we "enter into his courts with praise" as I am describing something amazing happens. *We begin to see things through God's sovereign and loving perspective, and this gives us comfort and peace in the face of adversity.* Each one of us needs to spend time each day in worship and communion with God. We need to study the scriptures. A great way to counteract the "bad news" of the world is to read about the "good news" of Jesus Christ who came to save the world, and who will one day judge both the quick and the dead. The Psalms are an entire book full of the strengthening comfort of almighty God. We should read them each day. We should sing hymns! These beautiful poems of the Church lift our hearts and souls upwards to God and away from the worries of the current moment. The bottom line is when we immerse ourselves in God we emerge as changed and better people with a more balanced and hopeful outlook on life. If the news cycle gets us down, let us get down on our knees and lift up our hearts to God in prayer and praise! Let us think about God. "*Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*"

Faithfully, your priest,

J. Gordon Anderson

July 2016

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UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

Jul 4th - Independence Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jul 25th - St. James

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Aug 6th - Transfiguration

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Aug 15th - Assumption of BVM

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Aug 24th - St. Bartholomew

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Sep 8th - Nativity of BVM

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Sep 14th - Holy Cross

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Sep 21st - St. Matthew

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Sep 23rd - Ember Friday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Sep 29th - St. Michael

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

THEOLOGY: *Confessing Our Sins in the Sacrament of Penance*

Last month a number of clergy and postulants gathered together in Charlottesville, Virginia for a “clericus” which is a fancy word for a meeting of the clergy. Me, Fr. Edelman, and Tyler Phass made the long drive from Baltimore... which was not as long from a geographical perspective so much as it was from a traffic perspective (both ways)! It was a great gathering with colleagues to discuss pastoral matters and learn from each other how to become better priests. Because our churches are so spread out it is easy to feel isolated and alone in ministry. So thanks be to God for gatherings like these where we can get together to pray and grow for the glory of God. The topic of the meeting was the pastoral use of the sacrament of penance, also known as “private confession.” During the proceedings we discussed all aspects of this most important means of grace. One of the things that struck me was hearing how much this sacrament meant to the priests themselves and apparently to their people. Each of us there make our confession because we want to grow in holiness, and each priest hears confessions on a regular basis. How much do we know about this sacrament? Have we ever availed ourselves of the grace Christ offers to us through it?

This important sacrament goes by lots names, such as penance, confession, and reconciliation. Each of these names stresses one part of the sacrament. Penance refers to the offering (a prayer, a Psalm, etc.) made by the penitent (the person confessing his sins) to thank God for being forgiven. Confession refers to the act of confessing our sins. Reconciliation refers to what the sacrament does for us – it reconciles us to God and neighbor.

While the Church teaches we ought always confess our sins to God in private and trust in his forgiveness and mercy if we have confessed to him in sincerity and truth, and while the Church has seen fit to have prayers of corporate confession and absolution in her liturgy, she also teaches that sins may be confessed privately in the presence of a priest in the sacrament of penance. We see this in our 1928 American Book of Common in the Second Exhortation on pages 86-88 and in the Order for the Visitation of the Sick (the fourth rubric). As the various Prayer Books and other authorized liturgical manuals show, the Anglican Churches have indeed always made allowance for private confession of sins and, by the power and authority of Christ in whose Name they minister (John 20:19 ff.), endowed her priests with the power and authority to pronounce absolution in the name of Jesus Christ. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 294 and 546).

There are many reasons why the Church makes allowance for private sacramental confession. One of the

main ones, which the Prayer Book touches on, is that it helps quiet our conscience. The reality is that we often don't *feel* as though we are truly forgiven when we confess our sins privately on our own to God, especially when the sin is grave. There are certain sins that we commit that we carry guilt about and that confession to another person helps get rid of. Another reason why we might make use of sacramental confession is to receive council and advice in how to deal with besetting sins. Part of the sacrament is being given advice by the priest. Furthermore there are many things that we do that we think are sinful but are not. In making a confession before an experienced priest we learn to better distinguish between what is sinful and what is not. So there are many reasons why we might make use of this sacrament from time to time.

One might argue that we can confess troubling sins to anyone. That is true, but one must respond that only a priest can pronounce absolution in the name of Jesus Christ. For we go to confession not only to confess sin but then to be forgiven for those sins! Another problem in confessing our sins to another person is that he or she may very well go and blab to others about what we have done, or they may bring it up to us again and again in conversation. Even worse, they may change their behavior and attitude towards us after we have confessed our sins to them. In short, there are many reasons why it is not advisable to quiet our consciences by confessing our sins to just anyone, and we should instead do so in the presence of a priest in the sacrament of confession. A priest is strictly forbidden by canon law and church tradition (as well as general professional ethics) from revealing anything that he has learned in the sacrament of penance. Neither is he allowed to let information gained in the confessional alter how he interacts with the penitent. Private, sacramental confession is something akin to stepping into “the cone of silence” from those old “Get Smart” TV shows. Furthermore, the priest has at his fingertips years of pastoral experience in administering this amazing sacrament of God's forgiveness.

God has used this sacrament to bring great comfort and spiritual healing to millions upon millions of people throughout the ages. Every Christian is encouraged to make use of it as needed. It is customary to confess our sins once a year just before Lent begins. Many also make their confession during the Advent season. But we may do so at any time during the year whenever we feel the need. There is a guide on page four of *The Centurion* for those who are unfamiliar with the mechanics of the sacrament. And as always, the clergy are happy to answer any questions on it and hear confessions of the faithful. ✠

 BUILDING UPDATES: *Recent and Upcoming Building Renovations*

The Lord has certainly blessed Saint Alban's Church as of late! Our quaint little country church has been (and is still) in need of repair and refreshment in a number of areas, and sure enough, God has been providing. Here are just a few things that we have *had done* lately, or are *going to have done* shortly, or *hope to have done* in the near future.

New Air Conditioner for Parish Hall: Thanks to a generous donation from a parishioner we were able to purchase a new air conditioning system for the parish hall. Our old one was ancient and in dire need of replacement. Indeed it would often conk out during the summer, and so we would have to get a repairman out to fix it, which repairman would always say, "I don't know how much longer we can patch this thing up!" Well, we don't have to worry about that anymore! Our new unit should serve us well for many years to come. Thanks be to God.

New Lights for the Parish Hall: No more dim, burned out lights for us! Six brand new fixtures and bulbs were recently donated, as well as the labor to install them. Now our reception area looks bright and cheerful. Visitors and parishioners alike will no longer find themselves under dim, unwelcoming spots.

New Color Copier: Mr. Will Chaillou, president of Business Machines, generously gave the church a refurbished state of the art color copier. Our current machine has served us well but is definitely showing its age. It huffs and wheezes while making even the smallest amount of copies, and basically sounds like it is going to explode. Since insurance doesn't cover exploding copiers this new machine is a real godsend. Thank you, Mr. Chaillou!

New Water Purification System: Thanks to the generosity of Doug Workman of Liberty Pure Solutions the church has a brand new water system. Our old one has not been working properly for sometime. Despite an heroic effort to save it on the part of the vestry and a succession of junior wardens the old system just up and died on us. Parts were jammed, other parts were malfunctioning, other parts were just completely dead. A number of times this past year when people drank water from the faucet it was very salty or even brownish. So this new system is a major blessing.

New Air Conditioner for the Church (?): At the time of this writing we are in negotiations with our insurance company to have the air conditioning unit for the church replaced. A few months ago when the bell came crashing down out of the belfry it landed smack dab on the air conditioner right where the fan motor is. The unit is severely dented in and has sunk into the ground.

While it is working for the time being the vestry felt that it may well have been compromised and that it should be replaced, especially given its age. Related to this, when the bell fell, it smashed a number of slate shingles on the church and greatly damaged our gutters. All of the work – the air conditioner, the bell reinstalling, and the roof and gutter work – has been submitted to insurance. Please pray that it goes through. If it does the \$825 we had in our air conditioner fund will be used to pay the deductible. (Note: Thankfully the Rev'd. Jack Cooper Memorial Bell survived the fall. What happened was a bolt that helped hold the bell to the equipment in the belfry rusted out and broke. It was repaired by Rich Burt and reinstalled by David Demme, the original donor of the bell and son of Frannie Flatau.)

Painting the Church: We have received three estimates to have the exterior of the church (the old schoolhouse) painted. The old lady is looking pretty rough and tired these days, and is in need of some major TLC. The expected cost will be \$8,000-\$14,000 because the damage is so extensive. The entire building needs to be power washed, and parts of it have to be scraped. The power company will have to turn off our electricity so the areas around the power lines may be repainted. In addition, the walkways and doors and trims – everywhere where there is peeling paint – will be primed and painted. Once all of this is done the church will be back to her stately and gorgeous self! This is definitely something that we are going to have to raise funds for. If you are interested in helping with this important project please see Father Anderson.

Removing and Disposing of Old Split Rail Fence: This project needs to be completed. The interior portion of the fence surrounding the property has been dismantled. What remains are the old posts. They need to be removed and disposed of and the holes filled with dirt! If anyone would like to help with this project please see Fr. Anderson.

In sum, it is exciting to witness God's very tangible blessings upon us. We thank him for moving the hearts of his faithful people to step up and help out when the church is in need. As we've heard before, it is imperative that the church always look its best, and that every works and is up to date. A run down, broken down building reflects poorly upon us and our God. Once all of these projects are done we hope to turn our efforts inward to address some of the major problems on the inside of the building. There will be more to come on that down the road. But for now, let's focus on the exterior and other "under the hood" stuff! ✠

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: *How to Make a First Confession*

1. **Take plenty of Time.** Ask the Holy Spirit's guidance. Write down completely and fully, although briefly, the last two months of your life regarding sins in thought, word, and deed.
2. **A First Confession** means not simply the statement of God Himself in the presence of His and the Church's authorized representative, the priest, of a few outstanding sins which may be on your mind, but all sins from the age of about seven, when you were able to tell the difference between right and wrong. Cover the whole ground from then until now, unsparingly, objectively, clearly.
3. **By Periods and Places** is a good way to help remember what at first may seem impossible, as you try to look back over many years.
4. **Sins of Omission.** Most people forget entirely that sins are of two kinds; not just commission or doing wrong, but those of omission, not doing right. Our greatest sins of omission are the omitting of our duty towards God in prayer, worship and Sacrament. We are also often negligent in our relationships with family and friends.
5. **Sins of thought,** too, ought to be mentioned. This means thoughts of evil of any kind, sort, or description, which we have harbored or dwelt upon, even though they may never have issued in sinful words or deeds.
6. **Do not mention another's name.** You are confessing your own sins, not those of anyone else, no matter how much you may be convinced others led you or aided you in sin, or caused you to sin. Only an essential relationship needs to be referred to, such as mother, father, brother, sister, friend, or employer.
7. **No Explanations!** This is important. Your confession should state the sins clearly and bravely, to keep the confession objective, not subjective. If we start to explain, we run the risk of explaining away our sins.
8. **Be definite, specific,** do not generalize. State the sins and the approximate number of times each sin has been committed. We must make this distinction to aid the priest who is trying to help us, and to make the confession honest. There is a need here to be outspokenly definite, not vague. This isn't a General Confession of sinfulness such as we have in the Prayer Book liturgies. To be completely honest is your whole objective.
9. **Now** and not before this, read the Ten Commandments in the Prayer Book on Page 68 or the preparatory list in St. Augustine's Prayer Book. This will help you to remember some sins, especially from earlier years that you may have forgotten. Add these to your list.
10. **Now you are ready to go to Confession.** Enter the church and kneel down at the altar rail. The priest is sitting in a chair on the other side of the rail. When you are ready, begin your confession by reading from the form of confession found on the kneeling desk. At the point where you are asked to mention your specific sins, read your list from top to bottom. When done, continue reading the rest of the words on the form before you. The priest may now offer you some counsel, and refer to your confession. You may speak to him, and ask any questions you may have. The priest will then ask you to say a prayer or two, or read a Psalm as Penance. Penance is your act of thanksgiving for the forgiveness of sins you are about to receive. The priest may ask you if you are willing to do the penance assigned. The priest will then grant you absolution (forgive your sins) and complete the rite by asking you to pray for him because he is also a sinner. Leave the rail, and go to a quiet place in the church. There perform your penance. And remember.
11. **The Seal of the Confessional is absolute.** The transaction has been between God, your confessor, and yourself, and is sacredly binding, confidential, and holy in the highest degree. It is better for you not to speak to anyone about what has transpired. The priest is bound never to do so. You should now be filled with deep thankfulness. All your sins are forgiven. Face life anew, as without this means of grace you could never do unaided; and with it you are surer than ever of the hope of glory. ✠