

# The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

The season of Lent is upon us. Its forty days (excluding Sundays) will cover all of March and about half of April. Lent is a time of penitence and spiritual growth. While every day of every year should be characterized by those things, in Lent the goal is to practice them in a very intentional and focused way. In the ancient Church Lent was the time of year when catechumens – those preparing to enter the Church through baptism – were catechized (taught) the faith and prepared through special prayers, liturgies, and fasting. Fairly early on, those who were already part of the Church decided to join in with the catechumens and fast themselves in order to show their penitence and devotion to God. Fasting is something that we should practice during Lent if we are physically able. The Prayer Book says that the Church requires it. (p. li) It involves cutting back on our portions so we have no more than one full meal in a day. Snacking is obviously to be avoided, and we should try to refrain from meat on Wednesdays and Fridays. This all leads to a question. Why bother? What is so great about fasting that we should so inconvenience ourselves? Well, as Hubert Northcott, C.R. once wrote: “It reminds us that man does not live by bread alone. And it helps us increase self-control, assert the supremacy of the spirit, and turn our attention to God.” (The Venture of Prayer, p. 111-112) It goes without saying that the aged, infirm, and children, have always been exempt from the discipline of fasting. So give fasting a try this season of Lent and see how it benefits you spiritually. Coupled with fasting is the tradition of “giving up something” for Lent. There are all sorts of ways to do this. Some people give up food items (like potato chips) and others social media. I once met a woman whose family gave up electric lights during Lent! The purpose of giving something up is similar to fasting: asserting the supremacy of will and the spirit over the flesh. The benefits of giving up something for Lent are also similar to fasting. It says, “I can do without this luxury. I am not enslaved by it.” Time spent, say, surfing the internet, could be spent in prayer or good works instead. So think of something to give up for Lent. It doesn't have to be major (like giving up electric lighting). Just a small thing will do, and remember that Sundays are always exempt from this discipline. I do hope to see people out for Daily Mass, Stations of the Cross and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and for our Lenten Study. Details about our Lenten devotional schedule are on the back page. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not once again gently urge you to make a good private confession of sin during this season. There is little as spiritually refreshing as confessing our sins and failings in the presence of a priest, who in the person of Christ, assures us of God's love for us and forgiveness of those sins. I speak from personal experience. Try it for yourself!

Faithfully, your priest,

*J. Gordon Anderson*

March 2017

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UPCOMING PRAYER BOOK

HOLY DAYS:

**Mar. 1st - Ash Wednesday**

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

**Mar. 8th, 10th, and 11th - Lenten Ember Days**

Holy Communion at 12:00 p.m.

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

Holy Communion at 8:00 a.m.

**Apr. 10th – 15th - Holy Week**

Schedule To Be Announced

**Apr. 17th – 18th - Monday and Tuesday in Easter Week**

Holy Communion at 12:00 p.m.

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

Holy Communion at 12:00 p.m.

*Don't forget that we offer the Holy Eucharist Tuesday - Friday at 12:00 p.m. for other feasts and fasts of the Church! The schedule is found online.*

SPIRITUALITY: "Look At Yourself" – *The Art of Self-Examination by the Rev'd. Canon James R. Daughtry*

A few years ago there was a song from a Rogers and Hart musical comedy, entitled, "Glad to be Unhappy," of which the first words were: "Look at yourself. If you had a sense of humor, You would laugh to beat the band."

We do not look at ourselves very often and most of us, when we do, see ourselves unrealistically. Most of us do not have much of a sense of humor, at least about ourselves, but we should have. Perhaps we lack humor because we see only the unattractive things and stop there; then we are likely to think that that is all there is to the real "me." The dislike that we feel in brief, humorless introspection is likely to be carried over, dangerously, out into the work-a-day world where self-dislike becomes dislike for our neighbor as well.

Self-examination is probably distasteful to most of us, not only because we do not get past the unattractive traits of our character but because we are afraid of becoming so absorbed in self that we do not reach out to others as we know we should.

But, looking at ourselves, self-examination need not be a fearful or selfish act. It is necessary and implies that we have forced up our courage to face what we meet, to see whatever we are.

Let me suggest a series of steps, techniques for self-examination, which others have found helpful. To begin with, it is important to establish a time each day that is your own, your own silent time. This may be any time of day, but early morning or late evening are used most commonly. Take a few minutes to be alone. Look upon yourself as you went through the day just past. Begin with the most recent happening, begin with now, and work backward. The reverse sequence you may find is more logical and easier for recalling events of the past day.

As you look ever so briefly at each event, reach out simultaneously for three things: *First*, look for those occasions and opportunities you had to follow your vocation, to employ a talent, to exercise an ability and do it well. We all know that exultation, that listing up of the spirit and the senses when we have done something well.

There are some persons who feel guilty for experiencing and reject the feeling as pride. And pride it *could* be if you congratulate yourself on being a wonderful and talented person, boosting your self-esteem above another not as bright and able as you.

But the one who knows that his vocation, talent, or ability, has been given by God, and that whatever occasion he has put his talents to use has been *provided* by God, has not permitted sinful pride to corrupt his good feeling. He

who has God's grace to perceive that his successful is achieved as God's gift would not be tempted to think or say, "What a wonderful person I am," but, "What a great thing I have been privileged to do – to express God's creative activity." Such pure and human elation welling up from within is not pride. And so in yourself-examination, at each instance of an opportunity to do something well, you make an act of *gratitude*.

*Second*, look for those occasions in which the "good thing" has come to you from *outside*. Someone has done something good for you. Someone has been unexpectedly kind, generous, and thoughtful. As Christians, we might better say, "God has sent his blessing through that friend." God may also send blessings directly – an intuitive idea, a knowledge or a certainty, a benefit derived from working or sharing with others in your neighborhood or home. And for that benefit, in your self-examination, you make an act of *thanksgiving*.

*Third*, in your self-examination, when you come to those events or occasions in which you rejected God's call to use your talent, or when in the course of the day past you made a cutting remark to another, or you were greedy or dishonest, or in which you gossiped or refused an act of charity, or in any way you just plain sinned, you make an act of *penitence*. This is a brief act of sorrow for your sin. You have faced your shortcomings boldly. Your expiation is prompt and humble.

In taking yourself through these three steps of self-examination, which should take only a short time but should be done regularly every day, you will soon notice results. You may even be amazed at the spiritual impact on yourself.

The results are not imaginary or self-induced by any means. In following this technique with serious purpose you begin to build a character, a *new* character. Gratitude, thankfulness, and penitence become *traits* strongly manifested in your life, not just at the time of self-examination. As opportunities come, one by one, to follow your vocation, employ your talents and exercise your abilities, you will *see* God at work in you. You will begin to comprehend your part in the great plan of creation. Even as you are doing your job well, it will be in the spirit of gratitude and knowledge that God is very present, with you and working in you, and very much involved in his creation.

Also, you will perceive more clearly God's many blessings, and the people and circumstances through whom he comes to you and bestows his grace upon you. You will receive them, even at the time, *continued on page 4*

CHURCH HISTORY: *The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation – The First Article of a Three Part Series*

2017 is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation began when a German monk named Martin Luther became outraged at the sale of indulgences, which supposedly guaranteed that the dearly departed would be instantly freed from purgatory if only a small financial donation to fund the renovation of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome was made. To Luther this was tantamount to buying salvation. At the same time, he had a growing awareness of his own personal sins and fallen nature, and he decided that the devotional apparatus of the Church and her sacramental system were of little comfort to his tormented soul. So in 1517 he nailed a set of 95 theses to the church door in Wittenburg. This was how academic debates were often started in that day and age. And Luther, in addition to being an Augustinian monk, was also a learned university professor. These theses challenged the authority of the Church as it pertained to the doctrine of indulgences and purgatory, among other things. A theological firestorm developed – something that Luther did not expect – as his theses were copied and distributed throughout the region and then much of Europe. (The advent of the printing press helped with this.) Church authorities denounced him but he persisted, and so in 1521 he was excommunicated. Luckily, Luther found support among some German princes and other nobles. These protected him from the antagonistic supporters of the papacy that sought to haul him before the inquisition and have him imprisoned. Under their protection Luther was able to continue his theological explorations, which he saw as a return to biblical religion. He later came to develop such doctrines as “justification by faith alone” and “the bondage of the will.” The former being that we are saved only by faith, and the latter being about the utter depravity of man, and that because of his sinful nature he no longer has a free will and therefore cannot bring himself to God to be saved. The followers of Luther came to be called “Lutherans.” While it was not his desire to leave the Roman Catholic Church and start a new denomination, this was unfortunately forced upon him by his excommunication. Put another way: he was kicked out of the Church... he did not leave it by conscious choice. But he was jettisoned because of his refusal to submit to the authority of the pope. In the end Luther was as much to blame for his excommunication as the Roman Catholic Church. He is well known in history for having an extremely snarky, confrontational, and divisive personality. When a papal nuncio (messenger) tried to broker a peace between Luther and the pope, Luther publicly burned the pope's bull with which he disagreed as well as some other doctrinal papers that Rome had sent for Luther to consider. Apparently the

adage, “One attracts flies with honey... not vinegar,” had not yet been invented. Luther inspired other reformers such as John Calvin, Huldreich Zwingli, and Thomas Cranmer. Each of these people, as well as many other less known reformers, had different perspectives as to how the Church should be reformed. Some, such as Calvin, developed new types of church government, so they abandoned the ancient tradition of episcopacy (governance by bishops). Others reworked the sacramental theology of the Church, such as Menno Simons, the father of the Anabaptists, who taught that only believers – not infants – should be baptized. Still others, such as Cranmer, reworked the liturgy of the Church, while leaving much of the older traditions and theology intact. So each of the Reformers varied in the degree to which they thought the Church needed to be reformed. This is very interesting because while each of the Reformers claimed to be returning to an ancient, purified form of Christianity based solely on the scriptures, they, and especially their immediate successors, had major disagreements on certain theological questions. Indeed the main thing that seemed to unite them was the simple fact that they reviled the pope! But what was really at issue, particularly among the Reformers who wrote large doctrinal works, was the problem with their agreed upon doctrine of “sola scriptura” or “scripture alone.” This was the teaching that the scriptures alone – not tradition, church authority, etc. – was the final rule of faith and life. Evidently it did not occur to them that scripture, and anything that we read or encounter, has to go through a process of *interpretation*. And as we know, different people interpret things in different ways. This put them on the horns of a real epistemological dilemma. Which Reformer was right about Baptism, or the doctrine of the “Real Presence” in the Lord's Supper? Who was right about polity? In other words... how could anyone know which Reformer had the right interpretation and true understanding of scripture? This is problem that today still vexes the churches descended from the Reformation. Unfortunately, as a result of the doctrinal division that began at the Reformation, there are now hundreds of denominations in America alone that are not in communion with each other and have wide and varying beliefs on all sorts of matters, making Christ's prayer that we all may be one (John 17:22) seemly impossible to attain. While much good came out of the Reformation, so did a lot of bad, and this sad division is one of those. Over the next few months we will look at various aspects of the Reformation – the good, the bad, and the ugly – in order to learn more about this important historical religious and political event. ✠

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thankfully and with obvious exuberance of one who has just seen God and been the object of His grace.

When temptation comes your way, you will be sensitive to the subtleties of the Devil's work, and before the temptation has thrown and pinned you down, you will be on your guard with all the defenses Jesus gives us to beat down Satan.

Gratitude, thankfulness, penitence – chief traits of your new character – these are the ingredients of Christian joy. Christian joy is not the superficial, worldly show of happiness, but the deep serene joy of the lover of God, the brother of Jesus, the companion of the Holy Spirit. Christian joy and contentment will be the spiritual fruit of this style of self-examination.

One who persists in this practice of daily self-examination will begin presently to notice something

about himself. Acts of gratitude and thanksgiving will begin to outnumber the acts of penitence. Of course, there will be lapses and falling back. Sometimes we will be weak and dilatory, and we may have to start again with firmer resolve.

You will say, facing yourself squarely, "I have lots of progress to make, but I see my sins as problems to be dealt with, not as catastrophes; as faults and errors that I can *grapple* with, that I can do something about it if I try every day."

But first I must open my eyes, and look inside myself. Let me smile at myself a little, O God, and recognize my foibles. Let me begin with a sense of humor! Let me know that I am not evil but good, because you made me. Fill me with a sense of gratitude just for being. Increase my capacity for thankfulness for your everlasting love. Strengthen my resolve to acknowledge my sins and thus to open my heart to receive the blessing of forgiveness. ✠

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

### **Tyler Phass - Ordination to the Diaconate**

Our candidate for Holy Orders, Tyler Phass, will be ordained here at the church on Saturday, April 1st at 11:00 a.m. Please be sure to be here for that special day. A reception will follow.

### **The Bishop's Lenten Appeal**

Please give as you are able to the bishop's 2017 lenten appeal. The goal is to raise \$100,000 to continue to help the church in Blacksburg, VA. This parish, St. Philip's, needs to do significant work on their 1940's-era building. Located in a prime location two blocks from Virginia Tech, they have been doing very well in terms of growing and in terms of ministry and outreach. But their electrical system needs to be completely replaced. It is amazing that the place hasn't burned down! (I've been there... I've seen it... it is a nightmare... all of the original wiring is in place, and it is deteriorating rapidly.) They also need to get air conditioning. There is currently none, which creates huge mold problems in that climate. The priest-in-charge, Fr. Miller, has done a great job leading this once dying church to a position of growth and stability. Read his update on their work online at our website or on the bulletin board in the parish hall, and please give if you are able at least one dollar a day during Lent. This will help the church increase its missionary outreach to the Blacksburg community and beyond. Thank you!

### **Lenten Confessions**

The rector will be available to hear confessions during pre-Lent and Lent. This is a good time of year to avail oneself of the healing sacrament of penance. If you've never made use of this beautiful sacrament and experienced the healing Christ offers in it the rector would be happy to answer any questions that you have and help you in making your first confession.

### **2017 Lenten Study**

Join us during Lent as we study the Four Latin Doctors (St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and St. Gregory the Great) and the Four Greek Doctors (St. Athanasius, St. Basil, St. Gregory Nazianzen, and St. Chrysostom) of the Church. We will gather weekly for Evening Prayer followed by dinner (provided) and then a study on one of the doctors ("teachers"). We'll look at their life and times, the controversies and issues they addressed, the doctrines they expounded, and at samples of their writings. Our guide once again will be some books by the late J.W.C. Wand, sometime Bishop of London, whose book on the Four Great Heresies was used for last year's lenten study. We meet Tuesday nights at 6:30 p.m. for Evening Prayer, followed by dinner (provided), and then the study. We are done by 8 p.m. Join us! ✠