

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Last month the nation was once again gripped with terror as a deranged lunatic opened fire at a Florida high school murdering his classmates. This tragedy is added to the many other mass shooting tragedies we've seen over the past few years. Their increasing frequency is quite troubling. Many solutions have been proposed with which we're all, no doubt, familiar: arm teachers; ban guns; ban certain types of guns and accessories; limit the sale of guns only to people of a certain age, and on and on and on. All that is fine and well, and it is good to have such discussions, but it is pointless if we cannot figure out why these tragedies happen in the first place. Why do certain people "snap" and decide to start murdering people? Again, there are many theories. Maybe they are mentally ill. Maybe they are strung out on drugs. Maybe they come from bad homes. Who knows? And again, this too is a conversation worth having. But what I find amazing in all of this —as a Christian and especially as a priest— is how God is left entirely out of the picture! The deep spiritual sickness infecting our society is definitely a piece of the puzzle but hardly anyone is talking about it. This sickness has set in like a bad infection and is now threatening our very way of life. God has been jettisoned from the public square, and pushed to the margins of so many people's lives. And now we're really seeing the horrifying results. Dostoevsky wrote many years ago in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "If God does not exist then everything is permitted." Unless there is a major revival in the hearts of people acts of violence like this are only going to get worse. Even if guns are taken out of the picture there could still easily be many acts of violence and mass murder committed, as we saw in Oklahoma City years ago, and at the Boston Marathon only a few years back. People figured out ways to kill others — sometimes lots of others— long before firearms were invented, after all. If a person is sick and deranged and evil, and is a nihilist, he can easily, if he wants, figure out ways to kill lots of people. *People's hearts have to change!* That is part of the solution. People need hope, and need to realize that they have a purpose in life... that life is worth living. They also need to learn that there is a moral order to the universe, and that evil deeds will be punished, and that Jesus Christ will one day judge both the living and the dead for every single deed they've ever done. In addition, and most important, they need someone to tell them that God made them and that he loves them, and that he wants to be in a relationship with them. Who is going to do this? Who is going to go into the world and teach the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? The answer: *you and me!* The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 is still in effect. Let us "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever [Jesus] has commanded [us].*"

Faithfully, your priest,

J. Gordon Anderson

March 2018

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Important News and Other Items

UPCOMING SERVICES:

Mar. 2nd - St. Chad

Healing Service at 10:00 a.m.

Mar. 6th - SS Perpetua & Felicity

Evening Prayer at 6:30 p.m.

Mar. 9th - Feria

Stations of the Cross and Benediction at 10:00 a.m.

Mar. 13th - Feria

Evening Prayer at 6:30 p.m.

Mar. 16th - Feria

Stations of the Cross and Benediction at 10:00 a.m.

Mar. 20th - St. Cuthbert

Evening Prayer at 6:30 p.m.

Mar. 23rd - Feria

Stations of the Cross and Benediction at 10:00 a.m.

Mar. 25th - April 1st

Holy Week and Easter Schedule (See the back page for services and details.)

Apr. 2nd - Easter Monday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Apr. 3rd - Easter Tuesday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR: *How Is Your Lenten Observance Coming?*

As catholic Christians in the Anglican tradition our spiritual life —our devotion and worship— is practiced within the context of the ecclesiastical (church) year. The great seasons that we observe are a way for us to enter into the mystery of Jesus Christ... his life, his redemptive sacrifice, and his heavenly intercession for us.

We now find ourselves in the season of Lent. Indeed we're about halfway through it. This forty day period is a time for us to prepare for Easter by intentionally taking on extra devotions and spiritual disciplines. These aid us in mortifying the flesh and by their very nature help us draw closer to God.

While all of that information may be old hat to us, what is also (unfortunately) old hat to us is the frantic rat race of life that keeps us from engaging in devotional and spiritual activities. This rat race can waylay our spiritual lives by simply *distracting* us from God and from our duty towards him.

What have you been doing to observe a holy Lent? Have you fought the temptations and distractions of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and made some effort to deepen your spiritual life?

Imagine how different *we* would be, and how different the *world* would be, if we put as much effort into our spiritual lives as we do into our secular lives. If we spent even half as much time praying and reading the scriptures as we do on social media, watching TV, surfing the internet, working, and entertaining ourselves in the many ways that we do, then we'd really begin to make some progress in the spiritual life!

We read the news and stay engaged with current events through a variety of media all throughout the day. But do we read the scriptures each day? Do we do any spiritual reading (a classic text, a devotional book, etc.) at all during Lent? We should! Immersing ourselves in the word of God and in the writings of his saints and great teachers helps us understand not only God and ourselves a little bit better, it also helps us interpret the message the world is constantly throwing at us. We often have no idea just how deeply we are infected with worldly ways of thinking and secular humanistic categories of thought! Scripture helps bring our thinking into alignment with God's way of thinking. It helps us develop a Christian world and life view.

Social media helps us communicate and stay connected with friends all over the world throughout the

day. We set up private chats, group chats, video chats, and on and on. But what sort of effort do we make to "chat with God" and stay connected with him during the day? In other words, how about about our prayer life? Just as it is super easy to send a quick text message to a friend so it is super easy to send up quick prayers to God throughout the course of the day. And then just as we take time to get in longer discussions with our friends over social media, so we should make sure we get in longer "discussions" with God as part of our spiritual lives. In other words, that we have a longer dedicated prayer time as part of our regular spiritual discipline. Our days should be marked by constant prayer and praise to God, in both formal and informal settings and ways.

Parties and gatherings keep us very busy beginning in October around Halloween, then on through Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve, St. Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, and up to Easter. Many people are invited to special celebrations for these days —at work, in the neighborhood, etc. But what about the special days

that the Church observes at occasional times of the year? Just as we resign ourselves to the fact that we have to do "a little bit extra" to remain close to our friends and family by attending their holiday parties and other special events so we should "do a little bit extra" from time to time in our religious observances to deepen our love for God and build our relationship with him. The special Holy Day services and Lenten activities that are offered at church are excellent for this!

It goes without saying that all of this —deepening our knowledge of God, spending time with him in worship and prayer, making extra efforts to fellowship and commune with him— should mark the *entirety* of our Christian lives, not just the forty days of Lent. The idea is that Lent is a good time to ramp up on these things and make a special effort to practice them so that they will become a habit that carried on in our lives after Lent!

When Christian devotions and observances are confined to one hour on Sunday (or as is often the case nowadays an *occasional* Sunday) we will stagnate spiritually, and we'll be at a loss as to how to deal with the ever-changing circumstances and trials of life. We won't know the Bible and we will forget to pray. But if on the other hand we devote more time to our spiritual growth and health the more our entire lives will be transfigured and transformed, and the divide between sacred and secular will diminish because *everything* will in a sense be subsumed under the realm of the sacred. May God grant to each of us a holy Lent! ✠



 MINISTRY: *An Ember Day Update from Seminarian Mason Waldhauser*

Ember Wednesday, February 21, 2018

Dear Friends,

I am writing to give you a brief update on my time here at seminary. Today is one of the “Ember Days” of the church calendar: a set of three days at each of the four seasons which is set apart for prayer for the ministry; and it is traditionally a time when seminarians write their bishop an update on their time at school. I wanted to adapt my letter to Bishop Grundorf for you all, my supporters, and fill you in on how the start of this second semester of seminary has been going. But first let me say that I am super thankful for your support of me and my calling, and for how you have helped me financially since my time here began. You’re the best! I’m in your debt and am remembering you in my prayers.

I’m taking five classes this semester, and so far the most impactful one has been Pastoral Ministry. Our last lecture was on “family systems theory,” which is a branch of psychology dealing with group dynamics, and it is helpful in applying to the personalities within the church. It’s about learning both to be confidently our own person, neither cut off from nor absorbed by our relationships with others, and about becoming conscious of the ways we learned to react emotionally to things from our upbringing. It was really helpful in understanding what good, rational, non-reactionary leadership of the pastor should look like.

Homiletics (preaching) is a close second for my favorite class. I will be preaching five times in class this semester, and we have lately been discussing the method of getting into the text in study and coming out of it with a message—a one-sentence affirmative statement of the meaning of the text. I’m excited to discover my own personal style. I think I’ll try to see if I can get the hang of preaching without a manuscript.

I was just awarded a \$6,000 scholarship for having the highest GPA of my class after the first semester, which is a huge blessing and has offset the cost of my tuition! Your support is helping me big-time with the debt from last semester and my current living expenses (like my airfare home for Easter break and my food on the weekends, when the cafeteria is closed). I have been in communication with a church in California to do a six-week internship to work and experience life in their parish, and I am really hoping it will work out. The money you donated would be a big help in funding that road trip. I’ll keep you posted!

In my own personal reading, I’ve been learning about the importance of inward solitude, stillness, and silence with God, and I just finished the *Way of a Pilgrim*, a work on what it means to pray without ceasing (based on the teachings of the Eastern Christian spiritual fathers) and the practice of the Jesus Prayer. The Jesus Prayer goes like this: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*, and is meant to be repeated over and over again throughout the day.

It has really been a game-changer for me these last few weeks and has shown me how prayer isn’t as much about getting what we ask for as it is about realizing a continual inward communion with God: becoming conscious of his presence with us. This frequent invocation of the Name of Jesus has made me realize more and more the stability and grounding that I have in him apart from what’s going on circumstantially. Practicing this prayer just while I’m walking to class or cleaning my room or have a spare minute here or there in my day has made me *feel* my connection with God more and more in a deep down way instead of just believing it, and has shown me that communion with God is always accessible to us if we just learn to become present to him.

Life here in Wisconsin has been wonderful. This is a cool part of the country, and Milwaukee’s a fun city. I just visited the art museum downtown on Friday after my classes, and I’m going to a classical music concert with a friend from church this coming Friday. It’s definitely cold here, though: a couple of us actually went ice fishing on the school’s lake a few weeks ago. It was about a foot-and-a-half of solid ice! We didn’t catch anything, but it was fun just to hang out. We also made a trip downtown recently for a minor league hockey game (my first time). It’s a really good group of people here at the school. We do “pub night” every Tuesday and Friday at the bar on campus (though we’ve reined it in now that Lent has begun), and there’s a couple that has me and the other single guys over every Saturday night for a home-cooked meal. They’re vegans, but the conversations over dinner are never bland. I’m really happy to be here with these guys.

I’d be happy to catch up with you anytime: I’m only ever a phone call away. I’ll write again soon. Praying for a good Lent for you all, and thanks again! ✠

In all Christian love,

Mason Waldhauser

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

2018 Lenten Activities and Study

Before we know it Lent will be over and it will be Easter. Please join us for our remaining Lenten services and events listed on the “Upcoming Services” column on the front page. In our Tuesday evening Lenten study we are looking at the Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude. These virtues form the basis of the moral life. As always we begin the study with a short service of Evening Prayer, and then have dinner and our study. Other services during Lent include Holy Communion and Stations of the Cross with Benediction on Fridays. Again, please check the schedule for the exact days and times of the services and events.

2018 Holy Week Schedule

3/25 Palm Sunday — 8 am and 10 am Holy Communion. Blessing and distribution of Palms at both services.
 3/26 Monday before Easter — 10 am Holy Communion
 3/27 Tuesday before Easter — 10 am Holy Communion
 3/28 Wednesday before Easter — 10 am Holy Communion
 3/29 Maundy Thursday — 6:30 pm Holy Communion. Followed by the Stripping of the Altar and watch before the Altar of Repose.
 3/30 Good Friday — 12 pm Solemn Liturgy and 6 pm Stations of the Cross
 3/31 Easter Even — 10 am Morning Prayer and Ante-Communion followed by decorating the church for Easter, and Evening Prayer. 7 pm Easter Vigil service.

Episcopal Visit and Confirmations

Suffragan Bishop Chandler Holder Jones, SSC, will be at St. Alban’s on Whitsunday, May 20th for our annual episcopal visitation, to receive new members, and to administer the sacrament of Confirmation.

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)

Is Christianity Weakening in America?

No doubt we’ve all heard somewhere or another about how Christianity in America is slowly shrinking, how less people are going to church, and how more and more people —especially young people— are identifying as religious “nones”, people who are unaffiliated with any church or religion. Such news has made church leaders very nervous. Indeed a recent article in *The Atlantic* said, ““Meanwhile, a widespread decline in churchgoing and religious affiliation had contributed to a growing anxiety among conservative believers.”

But new research from Harvard University and the University of Indiana at Bloomington challenges this “secularization” thesis. As an article by Glenn Stanton in *The Federalist* put it, “Not only did their examination find no support for this secularization in terms of actual practice and belief, the researchers proclaim that religion continues to enjoy “persistent and exceptional intensity” in America. These researchers hold our nation “remains an exceptional outlier and potential counter example to the secularization thesis.””

The question is how does one account for such different opinions: on one hand the church is “dying” and on the other hand it is “stable and growing.” The difference is that one group looks at declining membership in certain (usually mainline) congregations and from that concludes that Christianity and its influence in American life is shrinking. But what research actually shows is that the intensity with which people practice their faith (i.e. how often they pray, how much they read the Bible and believe it to be the inspired word of God, etc.) remains strong and is even growing. What is happening with church attendance is a shifting of allegiance. The mainline churches are losing members to other, mostly evangelical congregations. Stanton notes that there more people attending church now than at our nation’s founding.

The people that do drop out of church altogether, and have no discernible religious observance whatsoever (often associated with the “millennial” generation) are typically those whose commitment to Christianity was tepid to begin with. Apparently almost 90% of millennials who leave the church came from a home that had very weak faith and practice! It is hard to imagine how one could “lose” what he or she never “had” to begin with.

Do a search on “Glenn Stanton” and “Federalist” to read the fascinating, full article. ✂