

# The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Grace and peace to you! May the Lord bless each and every one of you during these "Great Forty Days," otherwise known as Eastertide. This is a special period of time to reflect on the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The proper Sunday scripture readings, collects, hymns, daily lectionary readings, and liturgical variations all have to do with this great mystery of our faith. The Christian hope is that because Jesus was raised from the dead, so we who have faith in him and have been made members of him through baptism will one day be raised from the dead as well. Like our risen Lord, when we are raised from the dead we will be given new "resurrection" bodies fitting for life in the new heavens and new earth! All of this can be mind-boggling to imagine, but it is part of the substance of our belief and talked about in various places throughout the scriptures. I look forward to expounding on different aspects of the doctrine of the resurrection as we go through Eastertide. Thanks to all who donated money towards the bishop's 2014 Lenten Appeal and for our parish appeal. We hope to be able to publish how much was raised for each in the next few weeks. Overall our Lenten season was pretty successful. While attendance was up over last year for the various events, it still could have been better. We offered something every day of the week at different times, but still very few people took advantage of what was offered. Please get involved in the activities and events that we offer during Lent and at other times to grow in our faith and devotion to God! A lot of work goes into planning and celebrating them, so it is very disappointing when more people don't show. Easter Sunday services were very well-attended. We had almost 30 more people over last year's services! Most of these were at the 10:00 a.m. service. The crowded and noisy room underscored the need to continue developing our building expansion plans. In diocesan news, yours truly has been appointed by Bishop Grundorf as area dean of the Mid-Atlantic Deanery, succeeding the Rt. Rev'd Robert S. Loiselle who faithfully served as our dean for a number of years. A deanery is essentially an organizational subset within the diocese. Our diocese has about seven deaneries. The dean assists the parishes in his deanery in any and all areas as needed, and can act as a liaison for the bishop with the other churches. Our deanery consists of seven parishes and two missions in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. The dean goes by the title "The Very Rev'd...." Despite this exalted sounding title, an area dean has no canonical authority over the churches or people in his deanery. He is there to help and assist, and be something like "servant of the servants of God." I cherish your prayers as I begin this new part of my ministry, and thank our bishop for the appointment.

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

*J. Gordon Anderson*

May 2014

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UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

**May 1st - Ss. Philip & James**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**May 26th, 27th, and 28th - Rogation Days**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**May 29th - Ascension Day**

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

**June 9th - 10th - Monday and Tuesday in Whitsun Week**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**June 11th & 13th, and 14th - Ember Days**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**June 18th - St. Barnabas**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**June 24th - Nativity of St. John Baptist**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**July 4th - Independence Day**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE: *Practicing Our Faith Daily Helps Us Become Mature In Christ*

There is an old saying we all know that goes, "Practice makes perfect." Years ago, when I was a boy, I decided that I wanted to learn to play the piano. So my parents bought a used upright and signed me up for lessons. After studying for a year I quit because I was making little progress. It was only years later that I realized this was because I never practiced!

About thirteen years later I decided that I wanted to study the classical guitar. My first instructor at university, a well-known Cuban guitarist and composer who himself had studied with the legendary Julian Bream, told me that in order to succeed I had to practice for at least one hour a day. I dutifully complied. The result? To this day I play the classical guitar for enjoyment and can sit down and play pieces by Dowland, Bach, Sor, Giuliani, Tarrega, and other great composers for the guitar, as well as works by many other composers (Schumann, Mendelssohn, Chopin, etc.) arranged for the instrument.

Now, looking back, I see that a whole new and wonderful world was opened up to me, and that my life changed for the better when I began studying the guitar. But it didn't just magically happen overnight. It began with simple, small baby steps, and daily practice of scales and exercises, and grew with daily playing. While I am certainly not a concert quality guitarist, I am much better on this instrument than the piano. I got so much more out of the guitar, and it had a much broader impact on my life and the lives of others than piano ever did. Why? *Because practice makes perfect.*

Isn't the spiritual life the same way? The more we practice our faith the more we will grow as Christians, and the more meaningful our faith will become for us. By "practicing our faith daily" I mean not only trying to obey God's commandments and do

good works (e.g. not telling lies, doing a diligent job at work, helping a person in need, etc.)... though that is indeed part of it. Rather, I mean having a daily time of worship and devotion to almighty God... a time each day when we sit down and intentionally block everything else out in order to spend time alone with God in prayer and meditation, scripture reading, and daily worship. Doing that is one of the most important ways to grow spiritually and become new creations in Jesus Christ because it helps us to come to know God on a personal level.

I think that one of the reasons our attendance at St. Alban's is often so irregular and spotty is precisely *because* so many of us do not have a regular, daily time of worship and devotion to God, and so we do not really know God. Therefore we think nothing of missing church for weeks at a time, or dropping out of church for a year or two, and then showing up again like nothing ever happened. Why should God and Christ apparently mean so little to us? Maybe because we do are not practicing our faith on a daily basis.

So many of us approach the spiritual life like I approached the piano. Since I didn't practice I never really reaped the rewards of the instrument, and so I naturally lost interest in it and quit. Also (and this is a message to parents) my mom and dad didn't make me practice piano and they let me decide to quit my lessons! (They did the same with my sister and her guitar.) Later on both me and my sister were somewhat bitter towards them for allowing us to just quit, as she wanted to become the next Jimi Hendrix and I wanted to be a church organist but by then it was too late for us! The same thing happens in the spiritual life. Many kids drop out of church and lose what little bit of faith they have, and

sometimes get in all sorts of moral trouble, because undisciplined parents (not the church... *parents*) do not practice their faith by making a part of daily home life.

Since I have been playing guitar for so long I cannot imagine life without it, or not playing at least once a week. And if I do have to put it down for a while, I can easily get back into it because of all of the disciplined time I spent in years past practicing. The same is true of the spiritual life. Those who take it seriously and try to grow in it will find that they cannot live without God, and that they are better able to cope with the trials and vicissitudes of life. Will we become "masters of the spiritual life?" Maybe not - just as I am not a concert guitarist. But we will be closer to reaching that than if we were to do nothing and have no daily spiritual discipline and rule of life.

Simply put, it takes more to grow in our faith and become mature in Christ than showing up to a weekly one hour Sunday service... or especially a "once-a-month one hour Sunday service." If we were to eat only once a week, then we would become emaciated and we'd probably die, so we eat every day to stay alive and healthy. That's what we have to do in the spiritual life. If the only scripture that we read or hear is the two scripture passages that are read during the Holy Communion service then the chances of us coming to a deep knowledge and love of God will be greatly lessened. Holy Communion will become rote, boring, and empty to us. If the only religious devotional exercises that we do are at the occasional church service, then we'll lose interest in religion, God, and Church, and, as so many do, just slowly drift away. But the hunger in our souls will not go away.

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THEOLOGY: *The Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ*

On May 29th at 6:30 p.m. we will celebrate Holy Communion for the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ (BCP pp. 177-178). Like Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Whitsunday, and some other days in the calendar, Ascension Day is a principle holy day of the Christian Year. On these days the faithful should make every effort to attend services. Just what is so important about Ascension Day that makes it a principle holy day of the Church?

It should be obvious from the name of the feast that what we are celebrating is the *ascension* of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven. As we learn from the Gospel stories, Jesus was mightily raised from the dead three days after being crucified. He appeared to his disciples at different times for a period of forty days, teaching them, and spending time with them in fellowship. When these forty days were up he gave his disciples some final instructions, and then, according to St. Luke, was miraculously translated out of time and space and into the heavenly places. So just as the second Person of the Holy Trinity, God the Son (the Word), *entered* time and space in the incarnation, where he took on human flesh, so now he *exited* time and space, taking his glorified human body with him. Then, according to the scriptures (Mark 16:19) and the Creeds, Jesus “sat down” at the “right hand” of God. This does not mean that heaven is full of chairs, or that God, who is a spirit, has arms and legs. Rather it is anthropomorphic language that means Jesus’ work is done and that he is now back with his Father in heaven. As one author has put it, “while the Ascension is an historical event, it is also an event in spiritual world, the exaltation of the manhood of Jesus Christ to the glory of heaven.” (*The Christian Faith*, Moss, p. 125)

Two questions arise from all of this: first, why did Jesus ascend into heaven; and second, now that he is there what is he doing? Concerning the first question, Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that he was going to return to his Father in heaven. For example, in John 16:28 Jesus says to his disciples, “*I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.*” So because he *said* he was going to go, he therefore *went* at the appointed time. That much is obvious. But a little bit earlier in St. John’s Gospel he gives a more specific reason as to why he was going, and that was “to prepare a place” for his disciples and us: “*In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and that you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*” (John 14:2-3)

Now at this point we must remind ourselves that heaven is outside of time and space. So when Jesus says he is going to his Father’s house to prepare a place for us we should be very cautious about thinking of heaven in terms of the material world that we experience on a day-to-day basis. Yet having said this, we should also bear in mind that since Jesus ascended to heaven in his glorified human body heaven would seem to have a material aspect to it. This is perfectly fathomable, as the spiritual can contain the material, but not the other way around. Heaven is a *real spiritual* place. For more on this read chapter 9 in *Every Thing You Ever Wanted To Know About Heaven: But Never Dreamed Of Asking*, by Peter Kreeft.

But getting back to the subject at hand, biblical language in Revelation and elsewhere that attempts to describe heaven is highly symbolic, and almost always not meant to be taken literally. So when Jesus says he is going to prepare a “place” he is not talking about building mansions and palaces, but rather indicating to his disciples that even though he is going to leave he will always be with them and they with him, and each person will have a position suitable to what he or she has by nature and grace grown to be.

Concerning the second question, what is Jesus doing in heaven, the scriptures indicate that in heaven Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). As the Church is universal and catholic, spanning the whole globe and crossing the boundaries of space and time, it makes sense that Jesus would ascend into heaven to make intercession for man, as the limitations of a purely this-worldly existence would not have made that possible.

Because Jesus Christ is our great high priest he must have something to offer on our behalf. Were he to have no more to offer God he would no longer be a priest. So what does he offer? *Himself*. His appearing before the father in heaven constitutes his offering to Father, which is why in the Revelation of St. John the Divine we read that Jesus appears before the father as “*a lamb having been slain.*” (Rev. 5:6) As one theologian wrote long ago, “He presents himself, and his living personhood, which has been perfected by suffering, and which is acceptable to the Father because it is marked by the meritorious death of the cross. And in this personhood he offers those who have been incorporated into it by faith and baptism and who unite in the Holy Eucharist with his heavenly offering.” (*Theological Outlines*, Hall, p.211-212) Thus, every time that we offer to God the Holy Eucharist we are participating in Christ’s intercession and offering of himself. His perfect offering is also ours in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. And that is perhaps the most important aspect of this important feast. ✠

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For man was created to know and love God and live his life in fellowship and communion with him. We will only become more lost spiritually if we drift away, and the chances of us drifting away increase the more we are content to remain spiritual "weekend warriors." As St. Augustine wrote centuries ago: "*The heart is restless, O God, until it rests in thee.*"

The church offers numerous events and activities to help us grow in our faith. Free literature and devotional magazines are available to all. A lending library is being organized so we can increase our knowledge of the faith. At weekly bible study we delve into God's word and become more familiar with the testimony of his revelation. Morning and Evening Prayer are offered each week at different times, which gives us an opportunity to learn how to use the Prayer Book. Special Holy Day services are held 2-3 times a month, so

we can take communion during the week and learn about some of the great biblical saints of God. Parish activities give us an opportunity to interact with each other so we may get to know everyone and share in each others' lives. And of course, it all culminates in the weekly Sunday celebration of the Holy Eucharist where we, as the mystical Body of Christ, come together to sing praises to God's name and offer him the Body and Blood of his Son in union with the same. It is amazing to me how many people do not even once in a while take advantage of even one or two of these offerings!

I notice things about those who do come to some of these extra services and activities, however. When you go to their house a Prayer Book, Bible, and other spiritual literature is right there on the table. Some talk about the TV preachers they watch. All of this indicates to me that they have a deep devotional life

outside of Sunday services. These same folk are invariably much more regular in their attendance, and they seem to me to approach life with a sense of faith, hope, and charity that is really impressive and inspiring, yet sadly lacking in others.

If you do not feel the spiritual power and presence of God in your life, if you have lost interest in God and spiritual things, and are not interested in Jesus and Church anymore, if you are bitter and mad at the world, then look at your life and examine your priorities. If you want life to change for the better, and to find that peace which passeth all understanding, then make an effort to spend time - meaningful time - with God *on a daily basis*. The more we practice our faith, the more mature we will become, and the more we'll get out of it, and we will come to know God better, and become more like Jesus. For remember, "practice makes perfect!" ✠

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PARISH NEWS: *News, Updates, and Thoughts from St. Alban's Church*

### **Trip to Ladew Topiary Garden:**

We are trying to organize a group to visit this incredible local landmark on a weekday or Saturday in May after Mother's Day. If you'd like to join us please sign up in the parish hall and indicate whether a weekday or Saturday (17th or 24th) would work best for you. By signing up you are committing yourself to coming. You are only helping us decide when would be the best time for everyone to go. Ladew Topiary Garden is located very near to the church. You can find out more information on their website: [www.ladewgardens.com](http://www.ladewgardens.com)

### **Bans of Marriage:**

I publish the Bans of Marriage between Holly Dixon of Fallston, and Tyler Phass of Havre de Grace. If any of you know cause, or just impediment, why these two persons should not be joined together in holy Matrimony, ye are to declare it. This is the first time of asking. (BCP p. 304)

### **Ascension Day Service and Spaghetti Supper:**

Join us Thursday, May 29th for Holy Communion at 6:30 p.m. for Ascension Day. Following the service will be our annual spaghetti supper and some entertainment.

### **Welcome Father Bill:**

Bishop Grundorf has officially licensed our dear friend, Fr. Bill Smith, to assist at St. Alban's and in the diocese as needed. Fr. Bill has been a longtime friend of St. Alban's. Welcome aboard, Father Bill!

### **What is your bounden duty as a member of the Church?**

My bounden duty 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)

### **Quote of the Month:**

ON DIVINE GUIDANCE - "God guides us more through the unconscious than through the conscious because the unconscious doesn't keep arguing with him." *from "A Turn of the Clock" by Peter Kreeft*

### **Please remember St. Alban's in your estate planning**

- "The Minister is ordered, from time to time, to advise the People, whilst they are in health, to make Wills arranging for the disposal of the their temporal goods, and, when of ability, to leave Bequests for religious and charitable uses." (BCP, p. 320) ✠