

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Years ago I had a wonderful spiritual director named Fr. Vincent McMurray, who was a retired priest of the Society of Saint Sulpice, a Roman Catholic religious order. Father Vincent gave me some great advice that I still remember about living a priestly life. He was also full of aphorisms about the Christian life in general. My favorite was: "The Catholic faith is beautiful." As an artist, destined to one day become a priest, this succinct yet profound statement immediately stuck with me, and I've obviously never forgotten it. As baptized people we are part of Christ's One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Jesus has only one mystical Body, and that is the Catholic Church. As *Anglicans* we are blessed to have the fullness of the Catholic faith, without the Roman additions or the Protestant subtractions. In our worship at Saint Alban's we experience the beauty of the Catholic faith on a regular basis. The solemn words of our liturgy – the only liturgy in continual use since the 16th century, and yet with roots in the ancient and medieval Church – take the words of the scriptures and turn them into sublime poetry. Our hymns do the same thing. The majesty of the King James Bible is unparalleled. Mr. Glock's phenomenal musical artistry on the organ brings us music of the likes of Bach, Handel, Brahms, Widor, Buxtehude, and many others every Sunday. Warren is literally one of Baltimore's best organists, and we are very fortunate to have him. Then there is the ceremonial and objects of the liturgy: the liturgical choreography of the servers, the bells, the swirling of the incense (which reminds us of heaven and the prayers of the saints), the flickering candles, the glittering vestments, the great art (reredos behind the altar, the icons on the east wall, the crucifixes from Spain and Germany, the ancient and medieval chants, the sparkling silver chalices. All of that, replete with symbolism, tradition, and significance, elevates our hearts and souls and transports us, as it were, to the heavenly realms. Only the most beautiful and profound stuff is used in Divine Worship, and is truly fitting for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Ultimately, the beauty of the Catholic faith is the beauty of God himself, and his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. God the Holy Trinity is beauty itself. The accoutrements of our worship reflect that, and draws us more deeply into the mystery of our faith. I am thankful that the people of Saint Alban's appreciate and understand this. Though small, we are a true beacon and refuge for those who still believe in the numinous and the sacred, and who are looking for a more mystical experience in their relationship with God, and who have grown tired of the secular, profane, gnostic, and dumbed down "entertainment" that is passed off as Christian worship in so many churches today. Let us keep fighting the good fight of the Catholic religion and celebrate its comeliness.

Faithfully, your priest,

J. Gordon Anderson

MAY 2017

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Important News and Other Items

UPCOMING PRAYER BOOK

HOLY DAYS:

May 22nd – 24th - Rogation Days

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 25th – Ascension Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 5th & 6th – Monday and Tuesday in Whitsun Week

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 7th, 9th, & 10th – Ember Days

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 23rd – St. Barnabas

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 24th - St. John Baptist

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 29th - St. Peter

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jul 4th - Independence Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jul 25th - St. James

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

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

One of the things that the doctrinal controversies of the Reformation remind us of is the old philosophical adage that there is no such thing as brute facts. That is to say, when we experience some sort of phenomenon – when, for example, we see a tree, read a statement, listen to a song – we do not experience that thing in a vacuum, or in a pure, unadulterated form. Rather, we experience it through a conceptual framework of existing assumptions. Much like a set of glasses, and whether we are aware of them or not, every person has presuppositions that inform the way he or she thinks about and understands an object. This was as true of the Reformers (and their Roman Catholic counterparts) as it is true of us.

Why this brief philosophy lesson in an article about Reformation Church history? Because many of the doctrinal disagreements of the time arose as a result of the different philosophical starting points of those involved. While it was Martin Luther's goal to reform and purify the doctrine and discipline of the Church so that they were based on the scriptures alone, he seems to have been blissfully unaware at just how much he interpreted the words of scripture through the concepts and principles of the late medieval philosophical school known as "nominalism." Indeed, Luther's doctrine of justification is based as much on nominalist philosophy as it is on scripture.

Nominalism is associated especially with the likes of English philosopher William of Okham and theologian Gabriel Biel (whose writings and teachings greatly influenced Luther). One of its basic principles is that there is no underlying reality or substance of things. In other words, there is no such thing as "dogness" in which a particular dog participates. The word "dog" is just a name that we give to a particular object. We may just as well call a cat a dog. It doesn't matter. Everything is just "names." This, by the way, is whence the word "nominalism" derives. It comes from the Latin word "nomen" which means "name." When it is all said and done nominalism held "that the reality of an object was identifiable entirely with its observable characteristics. Each object was a separate bundle of sensible particulars; there were no real relations between different beings, and in any individual being there was nothing but its observable behavior." (Mascall, *The Recovery of Unity*, pp. 24-25)

Bearing all of that in mind, the great 20th century Anglican priest and theologian, E.L. Mascall, asks, "How, then, is somebody whose whole mentality has been cast in the mould of nominalism to conceive the activity of justifying grace?" (ibid. 25) What happens to Luther as he

tries to articulate what he thinks is an entirely biblical doctrine of justifying grace by faith alone (because he rejects the Catholic doctrine of faith working in love) is that he invents an entirely new doctrine that makes justification little more than a legal fiction. Because of his nominalist presuppositions it is impossible for him to conceive of salvation as an ontological change... a transformation on the level of man's innermost being. Luther finds himself in a dilemma because on the one hand, according to nominalist thought, there is nothing beneath the observable level to transform in man (or anything, for that matter – hence his doctrine of the Holy Eucharist), and yet if man were to be transformed on an observable level then he would end up being justified by works, because observable, exterior behavior is essentially his *total* activity. This would put his doctrine at odds with his reading of Saint Paul.

So Luther surmises that there is no real change in man at all but rather that God treats him as though he had changed. He says that man is *simul justus et peccator*... he is simultaneously justified and a sinner. Justification changes God's attitude toward us, but it does not change anything in us. We can be viewed as justified, Luther decides, because the merits of Christ have been imputed to us. (This despite the fact that Saint Paul himself writes in his epistle to the Romans that it is *faith* – our faith – that is imputed to us as righteousness! See Romans 4.) The person justified in Luther's terms may be likened to a pile of smelly, rotting trash that has a pure white sheet (the righteousness of Christ) thrown on top of it. Yes, it looks clean and orderly on the outside. But on the inside it is still a smelly, rotting, pile of trash.

As Mascall writes, the tragedy of late medieval theology, being steeped in nominalism, was that it was impotent to deal with a situation where people were trying to please God by doing good works without any interior, supernatural transformation of their beings, because such transformation is nonsense to nominalists. The tragedy with Luther, however, was that he was trapped in the same matrix. All he could offer was the imputation of Christ's righteousness. What of good works? He certainly believed that people should do good works, but they were inconsequential. God viewed man the same way whether he did them or not. They bring nothing to the table and do nothing for us... to make us more pleasing to God. "[Good Works] may have considerable moral significance, but they have no *religious* significance whatsoever. We may well wonder at a religion that places such a dichotomy between the realms of morality and religion." (ibid. 27) ❧

SPIRITUALITY: *Following in the Blessed Steps of Christ's Most Holy Life, by the Rev'd Dcn. Tyler Phass*

Our time is one that is filled with business and anxiety for the future. We are constantly moving from list to list, checkpoint to checkpoint. Our minds are obsessed with planning the future, sometimes even decades in advance. We are obsessed with receiving constant notifications, updates, and estimated wait times so that we can always be one step ahead of where we currently are. Ironically, however, in the chaos of our busy lives it is easy to lose track of a very important aspect of time itself: *the present*.

Jesus has taught us that *today* should always be at the forefront of our minds. He has taught us not to worry about the morrow, but instead, to trust Our Father in the present. He has taught us to resist being foolish enough to assume that you and I are guaranteed to have a tomorrow waiting for us. He has taught us that what we consider to be *our time* is not really ours at all, but rather a gift from God. Jesus has taught us that our lives belong to God and that we, like him, must offer them to the Father through prayer and devotion.

But as people sick with sin, this is not an easy thing for us to do, and without the grace of God to strengthen us, it would not even be possible for us to accomplish. To offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices, we must work alongside God's grace. We must be as Saint Paul explains, *in Christ*, if we are to honor God with our lives.

Jesus, during his short time on earth, did not fall to either temptations or distractions, but instead, lived every moment *perfectly in the present*. He has called us to do the same by being, as the Collect for the Second Sunday After Easter says, followers of the blessed steps of his most holy life (BCP, 171).

Although Jesus always lived life in the present, we ought not to think that he never spoke of the future or thought about what he may be doing in a few days. He was, after all, human and he was here to accomplish the future salvation of all mankind, from the very moment that he became incarnate in the womb of Our Lady. What Jesus' understanding of the present moment meant, however, was that he constantly and fully gave himself over to the will of the Father, trusting that his future was in God's hands. This is what he means to teach us when he says, "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof" (St. Matthew 6:34).

If we are to follow in the blessed steps of Christ's holy life, we need to know how his steps were spent. Through the Gospel accounts of Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and

John, we catch a glimpse of how Jesus spent his time here on earth. As people living in this busy time, reading about how Jesus spent the hours of his life can be a disturbing experience for us. This is because he spent nearly his entire life *patiently preparing* for the start of his ministry. For the majority of his life, Jesus grew up and lived as the son of a Jewish carpenter. He followed in the trade of Saint Joseph. He went to work. He dealt with customers. He made a living by the sweat of his brow. In addition to his work as a carpenter, Our Lord devoted a great deal of his time to study and prayer. As we learn from the well-known story of his visit to the Temple, at the age of only twelve, Jesus was well read and educated enough to converse with the most learned men of the Holy Scriptures. Jesus knew what it meant to spend time growing in wisdom and stature as a human being, and this is what he spent the majority of his time doing: working, reading, praying; all of this he did as the perfect man, to the glory of his Heavenly Father.

We ought to remember that it was not until the last three years or so of Our Lord's life that his ministry had openly begun. Until that point, Jesus had spent every day of his life simply honoring his Father in all that he did as he grew from an infant to a man. If we recall the events of these last few weeks, as we mystically experience the life of Christ through the Church Calendar, we will remember that the last three years of his life were spent in a frenzy of absolute chaos. In just three years time, Jesus went from being known simply as the Son of Joseph the Carpenter to being put to death for being known as the miracle working Son of God, the King of the Jews. During this unimaginably stressful time in Jesus' life, Our Lord remembered that what mattered most was the offering of his time to his Father through prayer and obedience to his will. Jesus remembered that he had to be present with his Father and that his time was not his own.

Being only the second week after Easter, it was just a little while ago that we were in the Garden of Gethsemane with Our Lord as he prepared to completely offer his very life for the sins of the whole world. In that vivid scene, we learn a very important lesson about how Jesus viewed the importance of prayer and devotion to God. If we think back to that scene, we can recall seeing the anguish of Our Lord as he was abandoned by even his closest of friends. In his hour of desperation, Jesus had asked Peter, James, and John, to join with him in prayer. This is how Jesus wanted him and his followers to spend their time in this crucial moment of his life. But instead of being present with their Lord and their God, the disciples gave into the weakness of the flesh and slept instead.

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Jesus' question to those sleeping disciples is one that should haunt our minds as a people who also struggle to stay awake and pray: "Couldst not thou watch one hour?"

We, like Jesus, must devote ourselves to God in prayer. We must stay awake and watch with him. We must resist the distractions of the Devil, who would have us forget that all we have been given is the present and that we owe it all to God as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. As Anglicans, we are blessed to be a part of a rich, ascetic tradition that promotes the importance of the catholic conviction of daily prayer. If we make good use of our prayer books, we will find that they contain many helpful prayers that can lead us in the blessed steps of Christ's holy life.

The Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer can help form us into the example of Jesus. Just as Jesus prayed, both corporately in the synagogue and Temple and privately upon the mountain tops of the wilderness, so too may we follow his example by making use of the Prayer Book every single day. May the following be our prayer as we seek God with a heart that desires to spend every present moment with him, the one who has created us, preserves us, and gives us all the blessings of this life:

O Almighty God, who pourest out on all who desire it, the spirit of grace and of supplication; Deliver us, when we draw nigh to thee, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with stedfast thoughts and kindled affections, we may worship thee in spirit and in truth, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen ("For the Spirit of Prayer"; BCP, 594). ☩

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

A "Thank You" from the Rev'd Dcn. Tyler Phass

Dear Saint Alban's Anglican Church,

It is hard to believe that so much time has gone by since I first became a member of your parish. Since then, you have taken such good care of my family and me, especially as I have been away studying at seminary for the priesthood. This past month was one of great excitement, as I was ordained to the Sacred Order of Deacons. I am so happy to have been able to share that day with you all at Saint Alban's, Joppa. I am so grateful for all of the beautiful vestments and gifts you all gave me that day! They will serve me well over the years in my ministry as a deacon, and God willing, as a priest. I use them everyday. Just this past month, I was able to take communion to the sick and shut-in while vested in my cassock, wearing the surplice you provided me with, and carrying the Blessed Sacrament in the wonderful pyx that you gave me. I would especially like to thank Father Gordon Anderson for being such an amazing mentor and friend over the past several years. You all truly have a great priest at the head of your parish! He has gone above and beyond in preparing me for ordination and is always there when I have a question or need some guidance. Father, you really are a spiritual father to me and my family. I would not be where I am today had God not directed me into your pastoral care. We love you and your beautiful family. Know that you all are in my prayers constantly,

The Rev'd Mr. Tyler W. Phass

Yard Sale at Vera Clark's House

Cathie Pace will be hosting a yard sale at her late mother's house on Saturday, May 6th at 2000 Helton Avenue in Bel Air. The church is invited.

Art Night at St. Alban's

Valerie Anderson and her designer friend, Patricia Baca, will be hosting an art night on Monday, May 15th from 7:30 pm -9:30 pm. More information on this fun night is available here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/nibs-and-nibbles-and-double-dipping-tickets-34166470834>

Ascension Day Spaghetti Supper

Mark your calendars for our Ascension Day Spaghetti supper on Thursday, May 25th at 7:00 p.m. Mass for Ascension Day will be held at 10:00 a.m. that day. A service of Evening Prayer will be held at 6:30 p.m. immediately before the dinner. The entire night will be an Italian extravaganza! Bring a friend. Any questions? See Linda Tillinghast.

Standing Notice:

"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) ☩