

# The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

A number of years ago when living in Virginia I thought it would be fun to get into bonsai. So I began collecting little trees here and there, reading books on the subject, and even attending educational events. At one point I had this gorgeous tree called a "Fukian Tea" —a tropical Japanese variety that is very popular with those who do bonsai. It was a complete mess when I bought it and had not been pruned in a while. So I pruned it and repotted it and actually got it looking pretty good. It sat in my office for a few months until one day I noticed that it was wilting. Naturally I assumed that it needed water, so I watered and watered it... but nothing changed. Perplexed, I called my mom and described to her what was going on with it. She immediately told me that it had a scale infection! "Scale" is an insect that attacks plants. They are these little brownish blobs that stick to the leaves (top and bottom) and spread to others and slowly kill it, which is what they ended up doing to my poor Fukian Tea bonsai. Since then I've always been watchful for scale on my indoor plants. The thing about scale is that you have individually scrub and clean each leaf. The insect has to be physically removed from the plant, sometimes (usually, in fact) with dish soap and water in order to save the plant. There is no way around it. It is labor intensive and painstaking, but necessary for the life of the tree. That is how the spiritual life can be. Growing in holiness and Christlikeness means examining every area of our lives and bringing it under the dominion of Jesus Christ. Every little part of our life needs to be scrutinized so we can find sinful habits that need to be cleaned and rooted out. We can't compartmentalize our lives and let certain areas of it remain closed off to our Lord. Regular self-examination is a good thing to practice to help us accomplish this. We ought to seek a few quiet moments each day to carefully look at ourselves and consider our lives. Are we holding back part of it from God? If so we need to get in there and address those areas. It's like cleaning the scale from plant leaves. Our whole life is a like that little Fukian Tea bonsai I had. Each leaf is the various parts of our lives... our relationships, our work, our pleasures, and so on. Are each of those parts of life given over entirely to God? Or do we have some spiritual cleaning to do? Because if left unchecked those areas can infect the rest of our lives and do us great spiritual harm. So let us be vigilant!

Faithfully, your priest, *J. Gordon Anderson*

May 2019

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UPCOMING SERVICES:

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

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**May 27th & 28th - Rogation Monday & Tuesday**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**May 29th - Vigil of the Ascension & Rogation Wednesday**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**May 30th - Ascension Day**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Jun 10th & 11th - Monday and Tuesday in Whitsun**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Jun 17th - 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.

THEOLOGY: *Reflections on Eastertide and the Resurrection of Jesus*

Eastertide blessings to each and every one of you! During the Great Forty Days of the Easter cycle (which includes the short seasons of Rogationtide and Ascensiontide) we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Because he was raised from the dead we who have been incorporated into him by faith and baptism also hope to pass through death to life... to one day be raised from the dead. This is the Christian hope.

Our life in the new heavens and earth will not be quite like this one. Everything will be new! We will have new bodies, and the earth and whole universe will be recreated, and (most important) there will be no sin to ruin everything. The key for us is that it will all be *real*. Why? Because Jesus' resurrection was *real*!

Some theologians over the years have made the claim that Jesus' resurrection was figurative, that it only "appeared" that he was raised from the dead... that he was a ghost, or that it was a dream and that the disciples in their bewilderment just imagined that he was alive. Others maintained that Jesus never really died to begin with, and that he merely passed out and was later revived and went away into hiding. Still others say that the disciples stole the body. (This is the craziest claim of all as it makes the quivering bunch of fishermen out to be something akin to United States Special Forces agents.)

While there are numerous problems with each of these theories suffice it to say that most of them are based on a type of elitist snobbery. That is to say, certain "enlightened" and "scientific" minds of today think that people from the first century were just a bunch of dummies who bought into every little mind trick or bit of folk magic that came along... that they had the intelligence of cavemen and would believe anything that anyone told them.

But the scriptures go to great lengths to refute that. They show that people in Jesus' day were just as skeptical of the supernatural as people are today. The New Testament has several examples of people who saw Jesus' miracles and yet did not believe in him even though they saw the miracle!

The Gospels go on to show in great detail that Jesus' resurrection was real... that it was a *bodily*

resurrection. That is why the resurrection narratives have so many physical elements about them: they talk of people holding and touching Jesus, food being eaten by him, people talking to him, and more. They also show that Jesus body was different than it was before. He could appear and disappear in places, and he was not always immediately recognizable. This shows that he did not simply "pass out" and later "come to" in his same old beat up, tortured body. No. He literally died and was then literally raised from the dead.

The early Church also bore witness to the truth of Jesus' bodily resurrection. We read in the Acts of the Apostles how those who witnessed the resurrection such as Peter, James, and John, were emboldened to go out against all adversity and preach that they had seen the risen Lord! It is pretty hard to imagine that they'd do that if it was all just a myth they invented around a campfire. Likewise with the immediate successors of the apostles —people like Polycarp and Irenaeus— the ancient Church preached the resurrection of the Son of God in the face of brutal persecution. Why would they do this if they knew it to be an elaborate hoax?

The answer is that they wouldn't. The only answer as to why the Church was able to do what she did in evangelizing the ancient world and the whole earth is that something real happened that first Easter morning. Jesus, the Son of God, was raised from the dead, and he spent forty days with his disciples preparing them for his eventual ascension into heaven.

If, because it is outside of our daily experience and understanding, we refuse to believe that the resurrection could have happened —despite all of the historical evidence and the events of the lives of Jesus' first followers— then what else should we not believe? The moon landings? The existence of subatomic particles? Scientific studies that tell us that smoking is bad for us? Alas, few of us would wish to go that far.

I for one believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. It is a perfectly reasonable belief. And because he *literally* was raised from the dead I have hope that I, and all who rest in Christ, will one day *literally* be raised from the dead in him. ☩

CURRENT EVENTS: *The Fire at Notre Dame de Paris*

A few weeks ago the world mourned as large portions of the beautiful cathedral of Notre Dame (“Our Lady”) in Paris burned due to a construction accident. Famous for its storied history and incredible art, the cathedral serves as the unofficial symbol of the French nation —sometimes called “the eldest daughter of the Church” due to the fact that the Franks were among the first barbarian tribes to accept the Christian faith. I have been blessed to visit France several times, and when I have gone I’ve always made sure to go to Paris and see, among other things, the great cathedral of Our Lady.

Like a lot of people, however, I couldn’t help but see something sadly symbolic of the destruction of this great Church. The fact is that the Church —the institution founded by Christ, not necessarily her houses of worship— is being destroyed across Europe at the hands of the much more dangerous and insidious enemies of apathy, materialism, and secularism. Everyone notices the big fire. But few notice the slow spiritual rot from within that is consuming Christianity and the glorious civilization it spawned.

Many in this present generation of Europeans, like those immediately before them, have rejected their Christian heritage, which gave them and the world the rule of law, universal human rights, science and technology, and so many other things and fields of knowledge and accomplishments that we take for granted today. Church attendance is at all time lows in many European countries regardless of denomination. While some critics of Anglicanism are fond of pointing out the low level of church attendance in the Church of England, they fail to point out the almost equally low attendance of the Roman Catholic Church in England.

European secularism has actually been growing for some decades, as the horror of two World Wars and tragedy of the Holocaust made some people doubt the power and love of God. All of this, along with with the rise of socialism and communism where the state is god, and the abject surrender of the Church to secular mores and notions has combined to create the godless and hopeless

Europe of today, with its (by and large) incredibly high unemployment, its culture of death, its low birthrate, its social unrest, and all the rest of it.

One of the main problems is that the Church in Europe needs to be revived. The sad reality is that the state churches of Europe and the Roman Catholic Church (which functions as a state church in some countries) are by and large spiritually dead. Like the mainline churches here in the United States of America these European Churches have largely removed the sacred from religion. They teach that the Bible is not the word of God, but rather the words of men, and that therefore it is unreliable, and full of myths and fairy tales. They have discarded the traditional categories of speaking about God —that he is a person, the Father— and replaced it with notions of God being an impersonal or even imaginary force... the “ground of being.” They are agnostic about the resurrection and the afterlife. One bishop in the mainline Episcopal Church once said that “heaven” is when peace and justice reign on earth, which is achieved through passing good laws. These are all errors, and contrary to the revealed faith of the Scriptures and the sacred tradition of the Church.

The people of Europe, and indeed all Christian people everywhere, need to return to their *roots* in order to truly prosper, individually and societally, and both in this life and in the next, because *it is impossible to truly prosper* without Christ.

There is an old saying that Christianity is always one generation away from extinction. Christianity is like the cathedral of Our Lady in Paris. It took centuries to build and maintain, and yet it could all be lost in an afternoon. The same goes for our faith in general. Apathy, distraction, and sloth (intellectual and spiritual) can in a generation wipe out the vestiges of Jesus in our lives if we are not careful. So let us daily and intentionally follow our Lord Jesus in all that we do and submit ourselves to him who gave his life for us. ✠

PARISH NEWS & UPDATES: *Building Updates***Building Fund**

In answer to many questions I've received... YES Saint Alban's Anglican Churches does indeed have a building fund. Please remember that donations made to this fund should be over and above our regular donations to the church which cover our normal day to day expenses. As with all gifts to the church, donations to the building fund are tax deductible. If you would like to contribute to the building fund make sure you write "building fund" in the memo line of your check or on your envelope.

**New Church Project**

Last month, on the Wednesday before Easter, a percolation test was done on our 40,000 square foot septic reserve area in the field behind the church. The goal was to see if we could get good percolation on 10,000 square feet of that area so as to allow us a larger "building envelope" for our future development project. Thanks be to God, this was accomplished. Now our plat will be redrawn and refiled with the county to show that our septic reserve area has changed. And this will give us more options for the (not too distant, Lord willing!) future expansion of our building.

**Renovations to the Existing Church**

While we are planning our new building the vestry has decided to make several needed improvements to the current church. This include installing wireless internet in the church and a having a new sign made, both of which are already in progress. Sometime around July we are hoping to have an idea where can put some additional parking, but we have to wait until the plans are redrawn (as mentioned above) to know where we can put extra spaces. The vestry also approved moving ahead with new lighting for the interior of the church to replace our older, unattractive lighting that regularly malfunctions. Vestry and other lay members are currently trying to decide on what fixtures to purchase. Repairs and repainting to the interior of the church is also on the horizon. Two medium-sized sections of the plaster walls need to be restored, and then we need to repaint the inside of the church and the ceiling. It

goes without saying that the east wall behind the altar will remain untouched because of the expansive mural on it. The vestry has also discussed opening up the wall to the porch off of the church and is currently trying to figure out how to manage that and the painting process, so updates on that will be forthcoming. Please keep our renovations and building plans in your prayers, and thank you for your continued support!

**Payment Kiosk**

The vestry is currently exploring adding an electronic payment "kiosk" in the parish hall to make it easier for people to give to the church. Whereas less and less people carry cash and checkbooks with them, and whereas most of our financial transactions are done via cards or internet services like PayPal, the church wants to make a way for people —young people, visitors... anyone without checks and cash on hand— to give to our ministry. I had dinner a few months back with some young people in their twenties and one of them, a graduate student, told me that she had only written three or four checks in her life! While many of us will continue to use cash and checks until the day we die, many others never use them. But these same people do indeed have money, and they want to give to the work of the church! So we have to accommodate their habits as best we can. A couple of different secure devices —basically small credit/debit card readers— have been discussed. Once purchased, the device will sit on the small, elegant wooden table mounted on the wall in the parish hall. It will *not* be an obtrusive looking "ATM Machine." Many churches (including Anglican churches) have already gone over to this model. Once the internet gets installed in the church we hope to move forward with this project very quickly. A final word for check writers and cash-only people... *you will not be disenfranchised!* The church will always continue to accept cash and check donations. (Related to all of this, vestry is also exploring online services to attach to our website so people can donate securely online. Again, many churches have added this model as well. More news on that will come when we iron out the details.) ☩