

# The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Recently I received a very nice e-mail from a former parishioner. She was a member here for only about a year before she had to move back to the state whence she came. In her message she wrote how much this church meant to her while she lived in MD. What she liked best about St. Alban's is that we are a *praying* church. I really appreciated that because it indicates that we are heading in the right direction in terms of our ministry and focus. St. Alban's is not a social club, an entertainment center, a business, or a religious museum. Rather, we are part of the mystical Body of Jesus, a home for pilgrims on their journey to heaven, and a light for Christ in this world of darkness. It is very important that we see all of our activities and endeavors in this church as being oriented towards Jesus, and not as ends in themselves. Lately the parish has implemented some changes including: changing our service times; engaging a local firm to handle the bulk of our payroll and tax responsibilities, and improving the building and grounds. We didn't make these changes because we had nothing better to do, but rather to better fulfill our mission to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In order to grow and expand our ministry and mission it is essential that we operate with the highest professional standards: our building and grounds have to be clean and look good, and have the amenities that people expect (such as a changing table, which we never had until *this year!*); our finances have to be transparent and done in strict conformity with the latest federal and state rules; and our services have to be at convenient times that allow for maximum participation and optimal worship. Other changes have been made, and down the road still more changes must be made. There is the problem of getting title to our property, and related to that our location in general. There is the problem of space for ministry. There is the problem of hiring additional and much-needed help. These are major issues that must be addressed later on down the road. But ignore them we can't! Because ultimately they can become (or already *are*) obstacles to us in fulfilling our ministry and vocation as a parish. There is one reason why St. Alban's exists: Jesus Christ. Our focus is ultimately spiritual, and on Him alone, and the temporal things we do in church and at home serve that spiritual end. Let us constantly bear this in mind as we live and grow as a church!

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

*J. Gordon Anderson*

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IN THIS ISSUE:

**What is the Apocrypha, p. 2**

A brief history of these biblical books

**Book Review, p. 3**

The Violent Bear it Away - by Flannery O'Connor

**Parish News, p. 4**

Upcoming activities and parishioner news and updates

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

**October 18th - St. Luke the Evangelist**

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

**November 1st - All Saints' Day**

Holy Communion (only) @ 6:30 p.m.

**November 21st - Thanksgiving (eve)**

Holy Communion (only) @ 6:30 p.m.

**November 29th - St. Andrew (eve)**

Holy Communion (only) @ 3:00 p.m.

**December 19th - Ember Day**

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

*Prayer Book Holy Day Masses last a little over half an hour and always include Morning Prayer! Please make time to come out for these important days as you are able!*

THE SACRED SCRIPTURES: *What is the Apocrypha?*

During our study of the King James Bible last month in our Tuesday evening class some very interesting questions were raised about the *Apocrypha*. What is it? Why do we read it? What sort of material does it contain?

“Apocrypha” is a Greek word meaning “hidden things.” They are a collection of biblical books from the Old Testament era that were considered part of the Hebrew bible by Hellenistic Jews. They are found in the *Septuagint* (also known as *LXX*), which was a Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Apocrypha consists of the following books: I and II Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The rest of Esther, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Song of the Three Children, The Story of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, The Prayer of Manasses, and I and II Maccabees. They are believed to have been written roughly between the years 300 B.C. - 100 A.D., though, like other biblical books, the events they describe often are from an earlier era.

In the Roman Catholic Church these books are part of the official canonical scriptures. But in the Anglican Church they occupy a lower tier. They are read as examples of life and instruction in manners, but are not used for the purpose of establishing doctrine (see *Articles of Religion*, *VI*). In other words, they are not considered part of the *canonical* scriptures. This is indeed generally consistent with the way the Reformers, and even some Church Fathers, thought about the Apocrypha.

The opinion of the early Church on these books is interesting. While the New Testament does not quote the Apocrypha at all, some of the earliest Church Fathers, such as Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, do. Most of the other ancient Fathers of the Church considered these books to be worthy of reading and study, and accepted them as part of the Bible. But in the 4th century some eastern Fathers began to shift their opinion on these books. Though still considering the books part of the bible, these people began to view them as less authoritative biblical books. This was not so much the case in the west, however, except with St. Jerome, who made a distinction between the books he designated “apocrypha” (he is credited with giving these books this name) and the “*libri canonici*” (canonical books). Generally speaking, the west continued to view these books as part of the entire canon of Hebrew scripture.

Everything changed in the west at the time of the Reformation. The Reformers wanted to purge the Church of so-called Medieval additions, including books of the bible that were not found in the Hebrew canon of scripture. While the Septuagint which contained the Apocrypha was the Old Testament of choice for many Jews outside of Palestine, and certainly for the ancient Church, the Jews living in the Holy Land did not consider the books of the Apocrypha part of the the scriptures. So the Reformers thought it best to

follow the Hebrew canon of the scriptures as set forth by the Jews in the Holy Land rather than that set forth by the Jews living in predominantly Greek areas of the ancient world. They defended their position by appealing to certain Fathers, such as St. Jerome.

The result of all of this is that so-called “Protestant” bibles typically do not contain the Apocrypha. If they do they are usually placed between the Old and New Testaments, or after the book of Revelation. Usually bibles that contain these books say so somewhere on the spine. Interestingly, the Apocrypha was included in almost all of the early English vernacular bibles, including the KJV and the Geneva Bible. But they began to be excluded from English bibles because they were not considered canonical, and because it was cheaper to produce smaller bibles.

The growth of biblical studies in the 19th century lead to a revival of interest in these books. Now it is realized that in addition to instructing us in godliness and holiness, they shed tremendous light on the inter-testamental period, the development of some aspects of our belief in the afterlife, and questions relating to sin, good works, and redemption.

We read the Apocrypha in the daily lectionary for Morning and Evening Prayer. Apocryphal books are always listed in italics. Lately in Evening Prayer, for example, we have been reading through portions of Ecclesiasticus (*Eccclus.*). The esteem with which the early Church Fathers (*continued on p. 4*)

BOOK REVIEW: *"The Violent Bear it Away" by Flannery O'Connor*

Flannery O'Connor, was born in 1925, and was the only child of a well to do family in Savannah, Georgia. When she was young, her father lovingly indulged her creativity and encouraged her story writing and drawings. She showed promise as a cartoonist, thinking from an early age that this would be her vocation. But in college it became clear that writing was her true vocation and raising exotic chickens and peacocks her avocation.

She spent most of her adult years on a farm in Milledgeville, Georgia a devout Roman Catholic in the Protestant South. (Milledgeville was also a home for the criminally insane, which may or may not have been the inspiration for some of her more outlandish characters.) These opposites, her Catholicism, her town's Protestantism, her family's wealth, the southern poor, are what she lived, observed and actively infused with her intellect, wit and creativity to culminate in her perfect story telling style.

She wrote many short stories and two novels, *Wise Blood*, and *The Violent Bear It Away*. The title of the latter comes from the Bible verse Matthew 11:12 which states, *"From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth Violence and the Violent Bear It Away"*.

In this story, the characters are blood relations with the belief that there is a 'calling' to be a "prophet" in their familial bloodline. When the story opens the prophet uncle "Old Tarwater" has died, leaving his tiny farm to his fourteen year old grand nephew Francis Marion Tarwater who was raised and educated in the isolation of this homestead.

The prophet uncle left instructions for the boy to carry out the details of his Christian burial, but the boy gets drunk at the farm's still and then burns the farmhouse. Young Tarwater believes that burning the house with his great uncle in it is the first act of his rebellion against his proposed prophet profession.

The confused teenage Tarwater has also been instructed to find his unbelieving Uncle Rayber in the city and to baptize his child Bishop, so the work of the prophet can be completed in the family. Young Tarwater does not want to be a prophet and does not want to baptize the child but since he has burned down his own home he ventures to the city

to search for Rayber to tell him that Old Tarwater has died.

The uncle is a raging non-believer and is afraid that the teen-age Tarwater is only "pretending" that he isn't going to baptize the child but will baptize the child if he gets the chance. Young Tarwater is deathly afraid that Rayber, a schoolteacher, is going to "test" him and educate him, then write about him in a school journal like a science experiment.

Bizarre indeed, but this strange plot holds the reader's attention like a head on collision in slow motion. It is impossible to look away but at the same time seemingly improbable to care about the hopelessness of these unlovable characters.

The characters are grotesque in appearance and activity with young Tarwater being sullen, mean, and dirty and his Uncle Rayber being so unenlightened that he appears to be a robot held together with the wires for his hearing aid and glasses.

However, this is where the genius of Flannery O'Connor comes into play. The story moves forward inexorably, gaining momentum as the protagonist's internal conflict is played out. Her characters are so unsympathetic that at any given moment, the reader might think, "Um, I think I'll get off this ride now, I'm not feeling very well".

But remember, her story is highly allegorical. There is the classic everyman story, good vs. evil and then the religious plane of the characters taking on Biblical roles of John the Baptist (the great uncle), Jesus (Tarwater), a fallen angel (Rayber) and the devil (a sexual predator). The devil preys on Tarwater's mind throughout the story and at the end the devil is manifested as a sexual predator that physically harms him.

Young Tarwater is tempted, he is tested, he sins and in the end he triumphs; he has an epiphany; he accepts the calling and in the last scene we see him going back to the city to apparently, spread his prophecy to the "Children of God". I did not 'enjoy' this story, it is too grotesque and unappealing for my taste. However, Flannery O'Connor is a skilled story teller and I was in awe of her characterizations of futility, lunacy and obsession. The plot was absurd but once entangled in

*(continued on p. 4)*

## PARISH NEWS &amp; NOTICES

**Pictures** from Bp. Jones' recent episcopal visit may be found on the parish website. Thanks to everyone who made his visit so special and successful.

**New Sunday service times** begin this month on October 7th! They are 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. Holy Communion

**Outreach services in October:** 1st Wednesday of the month Holy Communion at Brightview-Avondell, 2nd Monday of the month Holy Communion at Lorien Bel Air.

**Join us for our study on the Holy Trinity**  
Tuesday nights at 6:30 p.m. in October.

**Intercessory prayer group** meets on Thursday, October 11th at 7 p.m. at the church for a time of sharing and prayer for those in need in our parish community.

**Annual meeting** will take place on Sunday, November 18th at 11:00 a.m. immediately following the service. At this meeting we will approve our budget for 2013 and elect new vestrymen.

**Joint service of Choral Evensong** will be held on Sunday, December 16th at Grace Reformed Episcopal Church in Havre de Grace. Join us as we revive this tradition of worship and fellowship. ☩

*(Continued from p. 2)*

held these books should remind us all of their importance and value. If we did not have the Apocrypha we would not have the story of Judas Maccabaeus and Hanukkah, the beautiful love story in Tobit, knowledge of the archangels Raphael and Uriel, the story of the brave woman Judith, and more. Many of these stories are immortalized in great old master paintings found in the art galleries of the world. We would also be lacking much of the great wisdom literature that has shaped and

influenced the Church and the world for over 2,000 years. In short, just because these books are not part of the official canon of scripture does not mean they should not be read. They are part of the living tradition of the Church and the people of God, so we should definitely not ignore them! If your bible does not have the Apocrypha you may purchase it separately in the King James Version from Cambridge University Press. Go to Amazon.com and type in "Apocrypha" under books and you will find a nice hardcover edition for \$8.00. ☩

*(Continued from p. 3)*

the family dynamics, the tug of war between the robotic Rayber and the emotionally torn Tarwater seemed perfectly natural.

Flannery O'Connor's ability to convey deep meaning with an economy of words marks her as a great writer. An example: *The boy's hands opened stiffly as if he were dropping something he had been clutching all of his life.* This sentence was written at the exact time Tarwater has his epiphany. And it is certainly an adroit author who can weave a story that has meaning on two or more levels, create a whole world full of ugliness, and have the ability to infuse the horrific with humor, redemption and grace.

Flannery O'Connor was not a boastful person but she was pragmatic about her writing and confident of her ability to write very well. She knew that her finished product was as unique and as masterful as she and rich in texture and meaning.

This book should be experienced, if just to understand what it is like to read a novel written by a master craftsman at the peak of her abilities.

Like many experiences that are good for you this book is not a walk in the park, at least not for me, but it definitely had merit, enriching my thinking and learning. It is humbling to be in the presence of an author with the breadth of imagination Flannery O'Connor possessed and the depth of her scholarly knowledge in the craft of writing and spiritual matters.

When Flannery O'Connor died at the age of thirty nine after suffering with lupus for the last nine years of her life, America lost a writer of singular worth and an imaginative creative mind that has not been and cannot be duplicated. ☩

*Reviewed by parishioner Susan Kelly. This review originally appeared in "The Dagger Online Newspaper."*