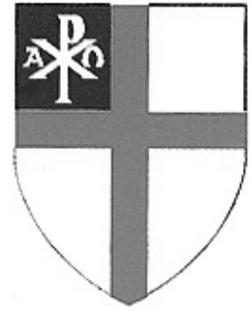


The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

I am really excited about the amount of work that we have had done on the building in recent months. A couple of years ago, when contemplating expanding the interior of the church, the vestry decided it would be best to focus on the outside of the building. So we had our beautiful slate roof completely repaired, a new air conditioner was donated, the gutters on the front of the church were replaced, the bell was reinstalled in the belfry, and now the entire church has been professionally power washed, scrapped, and painted. At the time of this writing we are still in the process of raising \$7,000 to completely rebuild the front entrance ramp and do some wood repair to the exterior sacristy door. We will eventually need an additional \$7,000 to rebuild the office entrance and sacristy entrance. I am very thankful to almighty God for the generosity of his people who made all of this possible. Saint Alban's is truly a fantastic little church full of faithful and devoted people. Once all of this work is done we really need to turn our attention indoors. As I've mentioned in past issues of *The Centurion* we need to address our entrances. They are extremely unwelcoming, and quite frankly difficult to use. But there are other problem areas. Flooring: we need to replace the flooring in the kitchen, hallway to the church, and the bathrooms. *None of it matches!* It looks terrible and reflects poorly on us. The kitchen flooring even has tears in it, which is a grave safety hazard. The positive thing about flooring though is that it may be something we can do ourselves. In the church, we need to have work done on our pews. Several of them have splits in the wood and they are severely beat up looking. A fair number of kneelers are malfunctioning. A few years ago lovely pew cushions were donated. At this point I'm sorry to say that they are the only nice thing about our tired old pews! The carpeting in the church is also becoming a problem as it is no longer sticking to the floor, but bulging up in a couple of places. We tried to fix that in the past, but to no avail. This past Sunday I almost tripped on it coming down from the pulpit. God forbid someone should trip on the carpet bulge in the nave and injure themselves and sue the church! There are also cracks in the paint on the walls. It looks very bad on the Gospel side of the nave. So, all of this just has to be taken care of. This is why we ask people to give generously to the church and her work. We need donations and gifts not only for the work of the ministry but for the mundane things: utilities, insurance, maintenance, and more. I can tell you that we are blessed insofar as our maintenance needs and costs are minuscule when compared to that of other churches! As we near the end of 2016 it is my hope that we can do some work indoors on these and other important projects in 2017.

Faithfully, your priest,

J. Gordon Anderson

October 2016

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Important News and Other Items

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

Oct 18th - St. Luke

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Oct 28th - Ss. Simon & Jude

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Nov 1st - All Saints' Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Nov 2nd - All Souls' Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Nov 21st - Presentation of
BVM**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Nov 24th - Thanksgiving
Day**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Nov 30th - St. Andrew

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Dec 8th - Conception of
BVM**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Dec 14th, 16th, and 17th -
Advent Ember Days**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

LITURGY AND SPIRITUALITY: *Praying for the Dead*

One of the most comforting things that we find in the Book of Common Prayer are the beautiful prayers for the dearly departed. In the *Prayer for the Church* (p. 74) we read, “*And we also thy holy name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear; beseeching thee to grant them continual growth in thy love and service...*”. On page 42 in the Collect for Memorial Day we ask God to grant to those who laid down their lives in the service of our country, “*thy mercy and the light of thy presence, that the good work which thou hast begun in them may be perfected.*” On page 268 one of the Propers appointed for a Requiem (funeral) Mass reads, “*O GOD, whose mercies cannot be numbered; Accept our prayers on behalf of the soul of thy servant departed, and grant him an entrance into the land of light and joy, in the fellowship of thy saints.*” Needless to say the Burial Office, Graveside Service, and the Burial of Children (pp. 324-342) contain many, many prayers to be offered by the living on behalf of the dead. And finally, there is that beautiful little prayer on p. 598 that goes, “*ALMIGHTY God, we remember this day before thee thy faithful servant [N.], and we pray thee that, having opened to him the gates of larger life thou wilt receive him more and more into thy joyful service; that he may win, with thee and thy servants everywhere, the eternal victory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*”

Since her earliest days the Church has taught that her children here on earth (“The Church Militant”) can pray for those who died (the “Church Expectant” and the “Church Triumphant”). The reason for this is because those who die are not really dead. They have not “ceased to exist.” The scriptures are very clear that there is an afterlife. The dead have simply gone on to another plane and mode of existence. Christians – those who die “in Christ” – are alive in him. Whether we are walking this earth or in the presence of God in heaven, we who belong to Jesus are part of his living body.

That being the case it follows that we may offer prayers for the dead – for their growth in knowledge and love of God, their well-being, and more. If we say that we cannot pray for them because they are no longer with us then how do we justify praying for anyone who is not in our physical presence at the moment a prayer is offered? Just because a person is not in our physical, material presence it does not mean they have ceased to exist and that therefore it is futile to pray for them.

Praying for the departed is an act of Christian charity. While we do not know exactly what they are doing in heaven, and what they are thinking about or feeling, we cannot assume that they do not benefit from the prayers of the rest of Christ’s mystical Body, the Church. The prayers in the Prayer Book are oriented to this way of

thinking. They are very “general.” (“*Receive him more and more into thy joyful service; grant them continual growth in thy love and service; etc.*”) In other words, the prayers do not get into specifics because we do not know specifics about their current mode of existence. But one thing that we do know is that they are still human, and still finite. They continue to grow in knowledge and love of God just as we who are living do. Since God is infinite we will never be able to know everything about him. In heaven we will continue to grow in knowing, loving, and serving God. And that is one one of the main ways that the blessed dead benefit from our prayers.

Incredibly, there are some Anglican clergy who do not believe in praying for the dead. Others acknowledge it but can’t see the point to it. How they can think that way when they use the Book of Common Prayer which so clearly teaches it is utterly bizarre.

Perhaps it is because of a misunderstanding. Some people erroneously believe that in praying for the dead you can pray people out of hell and into heaven... people who lived godless, dissolute lives, and who caused great suffering, and who hated God, and so on. That is not what praying for the dead is about. There is a finality about bodily death. When we die, the fundamental option that we took in life – to seek God, and live for him, or to reject him and not care about him – cannot be changed. Just as the scriptures are clear that there is an afterlife where people go to heaven to be God, so they are clear that there is a hell where people who do not want to be with God go. (God *is* heaven. He is what makes heaven heavenly.)

That being said, we need to be very careful about assuming that certain people must be in hell. The reality that we have no idea who is there. The Church has never said, “THAT person is in hell.” She has said who is in heaven... but *not* who is beyond a shadow of a doubt in hell. She always holds out hope that those who live ungodly lives will repent at the last and be saved. And so should we. We should not refuse to offer prayers for a dead person simply because they were not as faithful as us. God is tender and merciful, and perhaps he knew or knows something about a deceased person that we do not. Perhaps they had “faith as small as a mustard seed.” Like the thief on the cross, maybe they repented at very end and placed their trust in Christ.

Join us on November 2nd at 10:00 a.m. as we observe “All Souls’ Day,” the special day in the church year where we offer the Mass specifically for our dearly departed loved ones who have gone home to be with the Lord. ✠

PASTORAL THEOLOGY: *The Increase of Evil and the Ministry of Exorcism*

There seems to be a lot in the news today about exorcism. In a recent issue of the British newspaper “The Telegraph” dated September 26, 2016 there was a fascinating article entitled “*Emergency need for exorcists after surge in people dabbling in Satanism and black magic.*” The article, which may be read for free online, contains interviews with psychologists and clergy from both sides of the Atlantic. One of the clergy was the man about whom the book and movie “The Rite: The Making of a Modern Exorcist” (the movie that starred Anthony Hopkins) was made. And there is another, longer article in the same issue (also online) entitled “*Leading US exorcists explain huge increase in demand for the Rite – and priests to carry them out.*” This article, which is well worth reading, features the aforementioned priest and then another one, whose story of learning to become an exorcist was once featured on the SyFy network show “Paranormal Witness.”

Also in the news lately was the recent passing of Fr. Gabriel Amorth who was the chief exorcist of the Diocese of Rome and who wrote two highly regarded books detailing his long career as an exorcist. (“An Exorcist Tells His Story” and “An Exorcist: More Stories” both published by Ignatius Press) Amorth raised the clarion call to have more priests trained as exorcists, with each diocese having its own official person appointed to this role.

Some of the stories that are related in the books mentioned above are utterly fascinating. There are stories of possessed people speaking in strange, unknown languages; levitating; displaying super human strength; telling of events that happened that they otherwise could not have known anything about; weird disfigurements that appear and vanish out of nowhere, and much more.

The two American priests and the other people interviewed in the articles in the Telegraph are adamant that the Church needs more exorcists because even though demon possession is extremely rare, it seems that more and more people are experiencing the malevolent influence of demons in their lives. Indeed, the two Americans talk a bit about their exhausting schedule as pastors *and* diocesan exorcists!

Why is this? One reason they give is the rise of interest in the occult: fortune tellers, tarot cards, ouija boards, casting spells and curses, trying to contact the dead, worshipping spirits, obsession with “ghost hunting,” and more. That stuff is not a game. It opens the door to Satan and demons in our lives so they can come in and oppress us. Another reason they give for the increase of demonic oppression and possession is the rise of evil in the world.

The use of drugs, the loosening of traditional sexual mores, pornography, mass oppression of the poor and weak, greed, and the like also opens those who practice it to demonic influence because it is behavior that is directly contrary to God and his commands. Needless to say, every Christian should avoid *any* activity or behavior that leads us away from God. Because when we turn away from God we are turning towards the devil. As Jesus said, there is no neutrality. “He who is not for me is against me.” This is one of the reasons why full fledged possession is so rare. Satan simply does not need to go to that effort to have people in his back pocket. If we are completely apathetic to God and to man and live only and entirely for ourselves then we are already his. We may never darken the door of a palm or tarot card reader, and we may even go to church, but if we live in bitter anger towards someone else and are not willing to forgive someone who offends us, then Satan probably already has us under his influence.

The skeptic might think that demonic influence and possession is a myth, and that the Church is confusing mental illness with evil spirits. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The articles indicate that there are strict guidelines and protocols that must be followed whenever anyone requests an exorcism. The person must see a medical doctor and a psychologist. A prayer team is brought in to pray for the person, and the priest employs various means to determine if the individual is really possessed or just pretending. Exorcism, which is at its base a ministry of healing, is always the last resort.

The way to avoid being influenced by evil is simple and straightforward. It is to live “godly, righteous, and sober lives.” It is to partake of the sacraments on a regular basis. It is to pray. It is to “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the scriptures. It is to live according to God’s commands by doing good and avoiding evil. It is love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. It is to ask for forgiveness and to forgive others as God forgives us, and more. Striving to live lives of goodness and holiness, by the power and grace of God in Christ, is the best way to steer clear of the devil. Though he will most certainly continue to try to attack us in various ways (just as he tried to tempt Jesus, the Son of God) holiness and devotion to our Lord strengthens us to resist his attacks. Saint Paul speaks of putting on the “full armor of God” so that we may withstand the fiery darts of the evil one (Ephesians 6:10-18). That armor is truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God. If we put on the full armor of God we need not fear the devil. Yes, he must be taken seriously, and we ought to believe that he exists. But we absolutely have nothing to fear if we stay close to our Lord Jesus Christ. ☩

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

Clergy News

Father Anderson was recently asked to teach a distance learning course for our diocesan house of studies (Logos House) on the subject of liturgy. Logos House is for men studying to be ordained to the diaconate and priesthood, and women studying for to be set apart as deaconesses, who cannot attend a traditional seminary. Students in Fr. Anderson's class are reading "Worship" by Evelyn Underhill, "The Worship of the Church" by Massey Shepherd, and "Liturgy and Worship" (multiple authors). We meet once a week over Skype for 90 days. If it goes well he will be asked to teach a few more courses.

Budget News

The draft budget for 2017 is being prepared. One of the areas where we can do better is in supporting missions and outreach. It is the rector's hope that we will be able to support in some small way our diocesan mission fund that helps our churches in the Caribbean and in Asia, Reformed Episcopal Seminary, which educates men and women from all faith traditions for ministry. They have given two parishioners, Tyler and Holly Phass, almost a completely free education! But they need more support to offer this for other students. Finally, it would be great to support the Prayer Book Society (USA). This organization promotes the use of the traditional prayer books and worship and theology of the church. They organize conferences, publish liturgical and other books, and support mission work in various African churches. They provide free copies of their magazine to our church each quarter. There are many other organizations to support as well that we might want to consider. But the bottom line is we need to make a concerted effort to reach out beyond ourselves with the saving love of Jesus Christ and what better way to do that than through prayer and giving?

Thank you!

Special thanks to Union Chapel United Methodist Church (the white church across the street from us) for giving us their old fellowship hall tables! We will keep these permanently set up downstairs for future yard sale use. A special thanks also to Tom and Beth Dixon for giving the church the shelving that now goes almost all the way around the basement walls. They will also serve us well when we have yard sales. Also, a huge thank you to Edwin Okoye for donating two new coffee machines to the church! They look and work great. And finally, a big thanks to Bob Farmer for getting the old fence posts from the split rail fence pulled out of the ground.

Coffee Hour

If you host coffee hour please remember to empty the trash can in the parish hall after you are finished cleaning everything up. If the trash is left in the can it attracts ants. Thank you!

"The light shineth in darkness..."

Sincere apologies for anyone who has been at church in the evening and had trouble seeing outside. At present only two of twelve spotlights are working. New bulbs have been purchased to get them going again. We also need to replace a few of the lighting fixtures by the doors (e.g. the office door) which never seem to work correctly. Please be patient as we slowly make these important repairs.

Episcopal Visit Reboot

Because of Hurricane Matthew our new suffragan bishop, the Rt. Rev'd William Perkins, was not able to visit us. He and his wife live in Florida in the DelRay Beach area. He was not able to fly out of the airport because Southwest cancelled the flight. We will try to get him up again soon.

Reminders

"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)

Quote of the Month

"Fellowship with Christ is participation in the divine life which finds its fullest expression in triumph over death. Life is a larger word than Resurrection: but Resurrection is, so to speak, the crucial quality of life."

William Temple, quoted in "A Treasury of Quotations on Christian Themes" by Carroll E. Simcox (Seabury Press, 1975) ☩