

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

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My dear People:

In 1954 the great German philosopher, Martin Heidegger noted the connection between “thinking” and “thanking.” In both German and English there is an obvious connection between the words “think” and “thank.” (German *denken/danken* and English *think/thank*) This connection between the words reveals a fascinating truth. Heidegger writes, “In giving thanks, the heart gives thought to what it has and what it is. The heart, thus giving thought and thus being memory, gives itself in thought to that to which it is held. It thinks of itself as beholden, not in the sense of mere submission, but beholden because its devotion is held in listening. Original thanking is thanks owed for being.” (*What is Called Thinking*, p. 141) Turning now to theology, in the original Greek the word “eucharist” means “thanksgiving.” Thus, the Holy Eucharist is our “thanksgiving” to God for all that he has done for us. So the question arose in my mind, “Why do so many people absent themselves from the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, our giving of *thanks*, Sunday after Sunday?” Perhaps it is because we do not *think* about our faith enough. Because if we spent more time *thinking* about the mysteries of the faith: who we are, who God, and what God has done for us - miserable sinners that we are - in Christ, then we would no doubt be more ready to gather with God’s people each Sunday to give him *thanks* for what he has done for us. We need to spend more time *thinking* about the Christian faith, and growing in knowledge and love of God, so we can become the people who God has intended us to be - people of *thanks...* eucharistic people. I often get the impression that some folk are afraid to think about God, and about the doctrines of our religion. When an unfamiliar theological word or concept is mentioned from the pulpit the reaction is frequently fear or befuddlement. But it shouldn’t be. We should actively engage our faith in God by using our intellect and reason. When we do God will reward us. For the prophet Jeremiah wrote that if we seek God with all of our heart we will truly find him. (Jer. 29:13) More important, when we truly engage God with our minds and in our *thinking*, we will be a lot more enthusiastic than we are about offering him our *thanks*. I believe that the more Christians engage God with their hearts *and* their minds the more we and the Church will be transformed for the better, and the world with it! May God help us to *think* on him, and in *thinking* on him, give him the *thanks* that he most justly deserves!

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

J. Gordon Anderson

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Mark your calendar for these important upcoming events.

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

September 18th - Ember Day

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

September 23rd - St. Matthew (trans.)

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

October 17th - St. Luke (trans.)

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

October 28th - St. Simon & St. Jude

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

November 1st - All Saints

Holy Communion @ 11:00 a.m.

November 28th - Thanksgiving Day

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

Prayer Book Holy Day Masses last a little over half an hour and, when celebrated in the morning, always include the office of Morning Prayer. Please make time to come out for these important days!

CHURCH AND CULTURE: *“New Age” spirituality is alive and well and is to be found in some surprising places.*

It is fascinating to see these days how there is on one hand the near deification of science and technology, and on the other hand an incredible rise in interest in new age spirituality and occultism. Cable television, for example, abounds with shows about ghost hunting, haunted house stories, psychic mediums, and more. These programs are found not only on the Syfy and Discovery Channels... the channels on which one would expect to find them, but also on travel channels, biography channels, A&E, and even on the Animal Planet. The Animal Planet, in fact, once had a rather bizarre show called “The Pet Psychic” where the host claimed to read the minds of anxiety-ridden animals! And while shows like these have been on television for a long time, they have never been available available in such abundance as they are today.

These sorts of programs have helped bring new age occultism into the mainstream. It is so mainstream, in fact, that one can take courses in it at local community colleges! Recent catalogs from the Community College of Baltimore County and Harford Community College show such courses as “Angels and Spirit Guides,” “Archangels 101,” “Paranormal Studies,” “Past Life Journeys,” “Astrology and Tarot Cards,” “Discovering and Communicating with the Angels,” “Ghost Studies (I-III),” and all sort of other weird courses. (As an aside, the fact that such courses are being offered at a community college shows how far the American higher education system has declined. It used to be that one matriculated to these schools to take a decent course in philosophy or literature!)

The reality about these courses, TV programs, and the like is that they are spiritually dangerous. Christians should stay away as far away as possible from anything that smacks of spiritualism and the new age movement because it has the potential to lead us away from God and bring evil spiritual influences into our lives. The Church has always condemned these sorts of practices - from astrology, which many consider harmless entertainment, to necromancy. Supposedly harmless entertainments like astrology subtly lead us to believe that our life is dictated by the random movements of nature rather than God and our own free will. Church Fathers such

as Clement, Hippolytus, Athanasius, and Basil to name only a few condemned astrology outright. More dangerous are practices like necromancy (trying to get into contact with demons and the dead... or “angels”) in the form of seances and ouija boards. This is also a rejection of God, as it presumes that some other source can give us answers to the questions that we seek life. And not only that, it is an invitation for very evil, powerful beings to invade our life. In the Old Testament necromancy was considered so evil and dangerous to the people of Israel that the death penalty was prescribed for those who practiced it! (Leviticus 20:27) Recent examples of popular necromancy include the famous show from a few years back “Crossing Over with John Edward,” which aired on network TV after school, or the famous 80’s movie “Ghost.”

The rise of new age occultism in our scientific age is just one of the many paradoxes of our society. While it has always been with us, the fact that it is so prevalent today reveals the incredible boredom and alienation of postmodern man. He is obviously bored, because that anyone would have time to take a “college course” in “Ghost Hunting” and then roam around a darkened house at 3 a.m. calling out to “unseen forces” is utterly ridiculous. Wouldn’t our time be better spent doing good in the world by clothing the naked and feeding the hungry? And rather than watching TV shows where the live studio audience listens to the medium help someone “contact” his dearly departed great-aunt, wouldn’t our time be better spent in prayer and the study of God’s word, or even exercising? So these trends clearly show the *boredom* of postmodern man. They also show that contemporary man is alienated from God and his fellow man. From God because he seeks the spiritual and divine in every place but where it is to be truly found, and from man because he is more interested in the dead and the demonic than in living in the world in *this* life with *real* people doing *real* things.

Christians need to assiduously avoid the evils of the new age movement because its practices are dangerous to our spiritual health. We must commit our lives to almighty God, immersing ourselves in praise and worship of him, and doing all such good works as he has prepared for us to walk in. ✠

THEOLOGY: *What are angels?*

On the 29th of every September we celebrate the feast of St. Michael and All Angels (BCP pp. 251-253). This day reminds us of the ministry of angels in the lives of Christians. Have we ever stopped to think about these beings? What are they, and what do they do? Are they real or are they mythical figments of the imagination? Since there is so much misinformation out there about angels on TV, in “college courses” (see p. 2), and on the internet, we would do best to go to a trustworthy source for information about them. For Christians, the most important resource for information about angels is the bible. The holy, inspired word of God gives us the most accurate picture of angels and their ministry. We read about them throughout its pages - from Genesis all the way to Revelation. We also learn about angels from some of the great doctors of the Church. Here are just a *few* important points about angels that we glean from the scriptures and Church tradition.

Angels are not human. This is an important point because some people think, based on popular culture and old Tom and Jerry cartoons, that when we die we become angels. Angels are in fact their own particular beings with their own particular nature and purpose.

Angels were created by God. In Colossians 1:16 we learn that angels are supernatural spiritual beings that were created by God. Though very powerful, angels are God’s creatures as much as we or a little chihuahua is. They are not “demigods,” and unlike human beings are not made in God’s image and likeness. Each angel serves God in his own way appropriate to his own order and rank.

Angels are spiritual beings. As spiritual beings angels are immaterial and sexless (Matthew 22:30). They do not have a physical nature as do you or I. Any time in the bible when they assume a human form we must understand that it only *appears* to be a body, or that it is *temporary*. As spiritual beings angels are eternal and cannot die or be killed. And since angels do not have a physical aspect they do not have *senses* (sight, smell, hearing, etc.) as human beings do, and therefore cannot come to know things in the way that human beings do! Instead, their knowledge is imparted directly

by God - each one knowing exactly what it needs to know to fulfill its task.

Angels were created by God to serve him, in part by ministering to man. The Greek word translated as angel means “messenger.” (This is why in famous works of art they are depicted as having wings.) In the bible they bring messages from God to man. We see examples of angels being messengers of God in the bible in Genesis 19, Judges 6 and 13, Matthew 1:20, Luke 1:26, and Hebrews 1:14. Angels also are protectors and servants of God’s children (Daniel 3 and 6; Matthew 18:10; Acts 12:7). But angels also serve God directly, as we see in Matthew 4:11; Matthew 26:53; Luke 16:22; and throughout the book of Revelation.

There are untold numbers of angels. Daniel 7:10 teaches that there are many multitudes of angels. But note that it says nothing about how many supposedly fit on the head of a pin!

The bible mentions different types of angels, and in some cases their names. There is the “Angel of the LORD” in Genesis 18, Exodus 3:2, Judges 2:1-4, and in several other places in the Old Testament. This angel is considered to be a pre-incarnation manifestation of Christ by some scholars. There are the four archangels: Gabriel (Luke 1:26 ff.), Michael (Jude 9, Revelation 12:7), and (from the books called Apocrypha) Raphael (Tobit 12), and Uriel (2 Esdras 4). Finally there are “Guardian Angels” and “Fallen Angels” such as Satan and the demons.

All of this and more is in direct contrast to the picture of angels that we get from popular culture... whether it be “Monica” from *Touched by an Angel*, “Jonathan Smith” from *Highway to Heaven*, or “Earl,” played by Leon Rippy, on the old USA Network TV show *Saving Grace*. Interestingly, all of these TV angels and their human costars are no longer on the air, having long since gone to that big “rerun in the sky.” On these TV shows we see angels falling in love, boozing it up, and more. Of course “Dudley”, played by Cary Grant in *The Bishop’s Wife* would never do such unseemly things, even though he was associated with Episcopalians! But I digress...

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The lesson for us is that we should strive to be *biblically informed* Christians so that we do not fall prey to the wiles and temptations of the devil. Our worldview - literally, the "way that we view the world" - should, as Christians, be formed by the scriptures and sacred tradition, which means we have to take the time, and make the effort to do things to grow in our faith. Most important of all with regard to this is reading the bible and spending time in prayer and worship each day, using the Book of Common Prayer and other liturgical and classical devotional texts as guides.

When we are we are better able to discern true teaching from false teaching, such as with angels.

Years ago, the Rev'd Billy Graham wrote a classic book on angels that may be purchased used online for as little as \$.01 plus shipping and handling. This is a great, trustworthy place to start to find out about what the bible says about angels. And for those already familiar with biblical texts on this subject, and who are interested in a more philosophical approach, Dr. Peter Kreeft has a book called "*Angels and Demons: What Do We Really Know about Them?*" that may also be purchased online, new or used, for a low price. ☩

PARISH NEWS: *Mark your calendars for these important events*

Sunday School for children and young people will resume on Sunday, September 15th.

We will be meeting at our usual time (about 11:15 a.m.) for a quick lesson and time of fellowship. Parents, please plan on having your children attend each Sunday.

Church Yard/Rummage Sale - Saturday, September 21st from 8 a.m. - 2 p.m.

We will need lots of help with this event, so mark your calendars now. We still need your unwanted items. Please bring donations throughout the summer and place them in the basement. If you have large items please DO NOT bring them now. Contact Beth Siegel to find out if and when we will be accepting larger items (preferably the morning of the sale) There will also be a **bake sale** the day of the yard sale. So please start going through your favorite recipes and think about making some yummy things to sell that day!

Sunday, October 6th - Jewelry Sale: Starting Sunday, October

6th we will be having a custom jewelry sale, from 11:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. following the 10:00 a.m. service. This is a fundraiser (similar to the way a Tupperware Party is run). The items are affordable, so please plan on attending. We are asking everyone to bring a friend, or two, to this event. Booklets will be available at the end of August/September. If you would like to see the products now go to www.origamiowl.com. We will also keep the party open for two weeks so that we can go out and get outside orders for those who can't make it on the 6th, or so people can take the booklet to work and get some sales. We will have some snacks at the party, and all are welcome! This would be a great place to start your Christmas shopping.

Sunday, November 3rd - Episcopal Visit and Confirmation followed by a reception:

On this day our diocesan bishop, the Most Rev'd Walter H. Grundorf, D.D., will be here to preach, celebrate, and

confirm. Please plan to attend as we welcome the chief pastor of the Church to our parish.

Annual Parish Meeting, Sunday November 17th immediately after the 10:00 a.m. service:

Join us after refreshments for our annual meeting. At the meeting we will be electing three new vestrymen to replace out going vestrymen who are rotating off of the vestry and/or moving away. We will hear about news from this past year and see where we have been and gaze into the future to see what's ahead and where we are going. Please plan to stay on at church, or if you go the 8 a.m. service return, for this brief but important annual meeting!

Quote of the Month:

"Childishness follows us all the days of our life. If anybody seems wise it is only because his follies are in keeping with his age and circumstances."

La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims*, 1665