

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

My first full time job as a curate almost ten years ago was at St. Mark's Church in Vero Beach, Florida. Though I was born in Florida (Coral Gables) and am a fourth generation Floridian I was actually reared here in Maryland. So when Valerie and I moved to Florida for the position at St. Mark's everything about the state was new to me. We bought our first house and it was perfect except for one thing: the lawn was completely dead. The well had dried up, and so the sprinkler system wasn't working. (Almost all houses in Florida have wells and sprinkler systems.) A new well was dug, and having learned how to tweak the sprinkler system we set off to regrow the grass. We also did lots of landscaping around the yard, planting beautiful flowers and bushes. By the time we moved we had the best looking lawn on the street and everything was gorgeous. "Wow, what did you do?" Asked the amazed rector, and also my next door neighbor. "You two have green thumbs," our realtor told us. When we left Florida for Virginia so I could take another church I was convinced that Valerie and I were "gardening gurus" who could grow anything anywhere. Boy was I wrong! Because we rented we didn't do much gardening in Virginia. But here in Maryland, where we own a home, we have been planting all sorts of things, fighting weeds... the whole nine yards. And let me tell you it has been an uphill battle the entire time. "What went wrong?" I asked myself? "In Florida we could get anything to grow! What is the problem here?" Then it hit me: because Florida is Florida... *anything* grows there! *Anyone* can have a green thumb when there is constant heat, sunshine, and moisture. Maryland is very different. So, while I *thought* I had mastered the art of gardening and lawn care, I really hadn't. This is how the spiritual life often is. We think we have "mastered" it because we read through the bible once, or because we grew up in a prominent parish, or because we attended a Lenten study one year, or because we haven't committed any grossly immoral sins. But then one day something happens that we are spiritually ill-equipped with which to deal. The reality is that *all* of us have so much more to learn and do in the spiritual life in order to become the people God wants us to become - to be transformed more and more into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ, and find eternal salvation in him. Let us not "rest on our spiritual laurels" or on the accomplishments and triumphs of the past. Put Jesus Christ *first* in your life and seek him daily in prayer and scripture reading. Make use of the sacraments which were instituted by Christ to be channels of his grace, and divine encounters with him. Faithfully attend the services of the church, as well as the fellowship and catechetical offerings as they arise. When we do all of this we will find that we are better equipped to handle the ups and downs of life, and able to maintain serenity and peace.

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

J. Gordon Anderson

September 2015

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Check out the important notices!

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

**September 16th & 18th -
Autumnal Ember Days**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

September 21st - St. Matthew

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

September 29th - St. Michael

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

October 28th - Ss. Simon & Jude

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**November 26th - Thanksgiving
Day**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

November 30th - St. Andrew

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**December 16th, 18th, 19th -
Advent Ember Days**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Remember, each weekday celebration of the Holy Eucharist includes the first part or Morning Prayer, so you not only get in a Mass but also your Daily Office!

MINISTRY: *Some Reflections On Ten Years Of Ordained Ministry*

September 2015 is a special month for me. Ten years ago, on September 25th, I was ordered deacon by Bishop Grundorf at our pro-cathedral in Oviedo, Florida. It has been an incredible journey full of interesting and fascinating people and experiences.

Many of these experiences have been sublime: baptizing children (especially my own) and adults into Christ's Church, solemnizing the marriages of some wonderful couples, comforting the mourning and afflicted, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, hearing confessions, and above all celebrating the Holy Eucharist... being used as God's instrument to make Christ truly present on the altar under the forms of bread and wine, for the spiritual nourishment and salvation of myself and his people.

Other experiences have been humorous, such as the time "Pie Jesu" by Andrew Lloyd Webber was sung at a wedding. (Ed. Note: That beautiful piece of music was composed for a *funeral* Mass, so the idea of it being sung at a wedding is completely hilarious!) Another time, at a funeral, a soloist sang a lovely rendition of "Ave Maria." My colleague and I could tell that the family members were not church goers when they came up afterwards and said how much they loved that "Anna Maria" song.

And still other experiences have been surreal and even downright frightening, such as the time I was briefly kidnapped by a deranged parishioner! As he was driving me down a road I remember wondering to myself how injured I would be if I flung myself out of the car onto the grass and made a run for it. Luckily, I got him to take me back to the church where I later called the police.

As I mentioned in last month's magazine, I am blessed to have some fantastic colleagues. In particular, I am thankful for clergy and laity who have mentored me over the years and helped me, and in many cases continue to help me, become a better priest and person. There is Fr. Guy Hawtin from St. Stephen's in Timonium, where I attended while in seminary. One of the things I learned from him is how important it is to have a sense of humor and try to enjoy the ministry. From Bishop Chad Jones, who at the time was curate at St. Stephen's, I learned the basics of catholic theology and the importance of deeply studying it. A spiritual director, Fr. Vincent McMurray, S.S., taught me to always remember how beautiful and sublime the catholic faith is. Fr. Charles McClean, SSC, taught me how to hear confessions. Fr. Raymond Unterburger taught me how to celebrate Mass with precision and beauty. His strong guidance and perfectionism were invaluable to me. Fr. Michael Ward taught me the importance of prayer and the sacred

scriptures in the life of the parish priest. Serving under him as his curate for two years was an incredible experience. From Fr. James Daughtry I learned how important it is to be patient in the spiritual life - patient with yourself, and with others! From Bishop Grundorf and so many other clergy I have learned the importance of faithfully carrying on the Lord's work even when all of the odds are against you and you feel like you can't carry on any longer. I could go on and on. There is so much more I have learned from these men over the years, and from lots of other clergy, that it would fill many pages.

I have also learned a lot from devout laity. In particular I think of the late Ed Scoggins, a lifelong lay minister who retired to the Presbyterian Home of Maryland. I began leading vesper services there years ago and he took me under his wing to guide me and pray for me. He was a wealthy man who gave away all of his money to help poor children in Baltimore City. (He himself never married or had kids.) Ed and I would get lunch from time to time and talk on the phone and visit. He was full of great advice that I think about to this day. One thing he told me was to careful not to play "favorites" with parishioners, because others pick up on it very fast and become resentful. That advice has indeed proved indispensable. I had the privilege of celebrating the Holy Eucharist for him in his room about a week before he died, and then I ended up playing guitar and singing at his funeral. ("Precious Lord, Take My Hand" arr. Hank Williams, Sr.)

One thing I am very thankful for is the patience with which colleagues and parishioners have treated me over the years. No one is perfect, and I am very far from perfect, yet I have always been blessed to work with and service some very kind and understanding people. Among the most patient was Fr. Mike Ward at St. Mark's in Vero Beach, FL. He was always putting up with me starting some strange and unusual service, such as a very high church, anglo-catholic Tuesday Mass, and the doing the old Solemn Liturgy of Good Friday, and then going on to sing rock-a-billy songs on the guitar at the local homeless ministry. I don't even know if I could have put up with *me* at the time! But he was very patient and gave me space to try things so I could grow as a priest. Other clergy have been patient with me as well, even Fr. Unterburger! On one occasion, when I was curate here at St. Alban's, I was celebrating Mass when all of a sudden poor Fr. Dic Baskwill collapsed in the sanctuary - right in the middle of sursum corda! Being a newly ordained priest I had no idea what I should do, so I just froze at the altar - afraid to move lest I desecrate *(Continued on the next page...)*

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something or other, or, even worse, make Fr. Unterburger angry for leaving the altar. So... I just stood there with my arms out, dumbstruck. Father began glaring at me and making strange motions within head as if to say, "Come on, what are you doing??" Unfortunately I was blocking his view of Fr. Baskwill, who was laid out on the floor and probably wondering why he was surrounded by such incompetent ninnies! Finally, Frannie Flatau saved the day and burst into the sanctuary to rescue Fr. Baskwill! Finally seeing what was going on, Fr. Unterburger ran over to assist. I can't remember what I did. It turns out Father was only dehydrated. An ambulance came and helped him and he was back in action in no time. But all of that is to say that none of those guys ever held that against me! Talk about patience! (Interestingly, a few weeks later, Josh Pons, Jr. passed out while kneeling on the same kneeler. Having learned my lesson with Fr. Baskwill, I immediately got up to help Josh and lead him out of the church.)

The churches where I have served have each had had their own unique style and story. St. Mark's in Vero Beach was full of incredibly wealthy older people. These hardworking men and women were the brightest and best of their generation. Let's face it: you don't rise to become executive vice president of BP, or a developer who builds massive skyscrapers if you are dummy! Though many of the parishioners were in their 70's and 80's they had a drive and zeal for life that I have rarely seen elsewhere. They were highly intelligent, and would attend my Tuesday morning Mass and study faithfully, asking phenomenal questions and making really intelligent comments. Their generosity to Valerie and me was incredible, as we were given nice gifts and treated to scrumptious dinners at some of the best country clubs in town. They were no doubt influenced in this by their rector, Fr. Michael Ward, who is without a doubt the most generous man I have ever met in my life. So my ministry in "Vero" as we called it was mainly to the elderly, though there were a few young families there too. And I really enjoyed ministering to the homeless community at a Christian ministry called "The Source."

St. Francis, in Blacksburg, VA, was completely different. The church had fallen on hard times and was in need of revitalization. What they had going for them was that they had an okay building a mere two blocks from Virginia Tech, and a core of dedicated, godly parishioners. In a few short years we went from having

one college student attending to, at the height, twelve and getting several new members. We did a lot of repair work on the building, and increased the church's profile in the community. God sent a wonderful, elderly priest to the area, Fr. David Coady, who I brought on to assist me. The college students really stand out in my mind when I think of St. Francis (now, incidentally, it is called "St. Philip's Church"). Their youth and enthusiasm was incredible. It is amazing, looking back, how God sent them to us in that hour of need. We desperately needed new members, and seemingly out of nowhere these college students started attending, and then others too. I would wine and dine them as best I knew how, of course, and they were warmly received by "the old guard," so it was natural that they should stay. They served the church in many capacities - at the altar, on the altar guild, at college events, and more.

A few months after our son, Evan, was born I was called here to St. Alban's, where five years earlier I was ordained priest and served a nine month curacy. What is ministry like here? It is very different from St. Mark's and St. Francis. For one thing, those churches were in well-defined communities. St. Francis was in the center of town, so people were constantly walking past it. Here, we are in an area that was once "horsey" country, but is now in the final throes of becoming a suburban bedroom community to Baltimore and Washington. Some people travel quite far to get here. There is not a great sense of community in the "physical" sense of there being a town center, and planned community. We are more of a "destination" parish. Our church is also the most diverse I have ever served. We have people of many different races and countries, and of all ages. It is an older, established parish that is firmly middle class. We also don't have a niche ministry (retired folk, college kids, etc.) All of this brings with it its own special challenges, and even though I have been here at St. Alban's as rector for almost five years I feel like I am still learning the ropes!

Being in full time ministry is very rewarding. I feel blessed to have been called to serve Christ and His Holy Catholic Church as a priest and pastor for these ten years (Saturday in Easter Week). Over the next few months, leading up to the ten year anniversary of my priestly ordination, I'll be reflecting a bit on ministry here in *The Centurion*. I hope that you enjoy it and find it edifying and informative. Please keep me and all clergy in your prayers. We need them, because we are simple, fallible human beings like you and everyone else. It is joy and privilege to serve you as your pastor and priest! Thank you for your love and support. ✠

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

In Times of Illness

Please remember to let Fr. Anderson know if you or a loved one is ill and in need of prayer and anointing. A home or hospital visit is just a phone call away! Healing prayers are also offered at the altar at Holy Communion. Please let Fr. Anderson know if you would like to have the laying-on-of-hands for healing at that time. Let us always remember the words of James 5:14, *"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord."*

The Dunning Lecture

This fall, world-renowned biblical scholar, Dr. N. T. Wright, will be in Baltimore at St. Mary's Seminary & University. On November 18, he will deliver the free Dunning Lecture, sponsored annually by St. Mary's Ecumenical Institute. This year's topic: "The Puzzles of the Cross." The following day, November 19, Dr. Wright will lead an all-day conference on "The Royal Power of the Cross." And November 18-20, EI faculty members will lead a 3-day, 3-credit course, N.T. Wright on Cross & Atonement, to include an a session with Dr. Wright himself. More information: www.stmarys.edu/ei.

Scotch and Wine Tasting - September 13th

Join us on Sunday the 13th at 4:30 p.m. at Steve and Linda Tillinghast's home in Bel Air for our first ever wine and scotch tasting! People who want to will also be able to watch the first Ravens game on TV! Call the parish office for more details.

Parish Yard Sale - September 19th

Please continue to bring in salable items and place them on the appropriate table in the basement. Try not to place them on the floor, as the basement sometimes floods. We will need all sorts of help with the yard sale. Keep your eyes peeled for a sign-up sheet with ways to help.

Does God Exist? - Tuesdays in October

Join us on Tuesday evenings in October as we listen to fantastic and scholarly debate between an atheistic biologist and a Christian philosopher and theologian on the question of God's existence. Is Christianity incompatible with reason and science? You won't want to miss the answer! Fr. Anderson will provide commentary on the debate as it progresses, explaining some of the more confusing and abstruse points when they arise. As is our

custom, we will begin with Evening Prayer and then have dinner, which will be provided. I hope to see you there!

Episcopal Visit and Confirmation - November 1st

Mark your calendars! Bishop Grundorf will be here on Sunday, November 1st (All Saints' Day) to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation and visit the parish.

Annual Parish Meeting - November 22nd

Mark your calendars! Our annual parish meeting will take place on Sunday, November 22nd at 10:00 a.m. *We will have just one worship service that day at 9:00 a.m!* We need as many people as possible at this parish meeting to discuss the mission and future of our parish.

A Call to Fast and Pray

Did you know that the Book of Common enjoins us to fast and abstain from meat on most Fridays throughout the year? (And in Lent on Wednesdays *and* Fridays, with each weekday of Lent being a day of fasting. See BCP, p. li, at the very top.) Please consider observing this spiritual discipline in some small way throughout this summer and the year. Find something from which to fast - it doesn't have to be food... it could be Facebook, TV, or some other activity - and use that time to pray! Fasting is a way to grow spiritually as individuals and corporately. Jesus regularly fasted and prayed. So should we. When you pray, please do so with the following intentions developed by a bishop of the Church: **1) That God would cause people to experience conversion of the heart and spiritual growth through our ministry; 2) that God would open new doors of mission for us; 3) that God would provide for all our needs.** Friday, the day of Jesus' death, is the ideal day to fast, but we may choose whichever day we want - save Sunday, which is never a day of fasting. God will do great things in our parish and in our lives if as many of us as possible corporately fast and pray!

Quote of the Month:

"What Adam hears first is a command. Against the conception of the world as something just here, the Bible insists that the world is creation. Over all being stand the words: Let there be! And there was, and there is. To be is to obey the commandment of creation. God's word is at stake in being. There is a cosmic piety in sheer being. What endures as a response to a command." *Abraham Joshua Heschel* ✠