

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Years ago during my freshman year of college I was given the opportunity to play percussion in the college symphony orchestra. It was a small school and they needed all the help they could get. When word got out that I had played drums in a heavy metal band in high school Dr. Monroe, the conductor of the symphony, offered me a small scholarship if I'd play percussion for him. I said yes, and so throughout the course of the year I bumbled along and tried to do my best at playing instruments like timpani, snare drum, chimes, and the bass drum. But I was constantly messing up. Alas, playing songs by groups like Judas Priest and Poison in a very mediocre basement band didn't prepare me well enough to play pieces by the likes of Strauss and Glinka! People in the sting section would roll their eyes as I would come in two beats behind on the overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. So by the end of the year I had been demoted to triangle... perhaps the lowliest instrument on the planet. Well, when May finally came it was time for our final concert. The big finale was the overture to *Die Meistersinger* by Wagner. Knowing this would be my last experience ever with the college symphony I was determined to play that little triangle to the best of my ability and go out on top. With one or two exceptions the triangle comes in only at the very end of the piece. So there I stood, counting, counting, and counting. And then, "Ding." What?! I got it!! Even Dr. Monroe who was conducting seemed amazed that I got the "ding" in the right place. I got the next few dings all in the right place too, and then finally at the very end it was a bunch of sixteenth notes, "Ding a ling a ling a ling," I rang as loudly as possible ("fortissimo"). When the conductor cut me off at the right time I thought to myself, "I did it... I did it. Finally, I didn't screw up." Afterwards a friend, Brad Hummel, came up to me and shook my hand and smiled and said, "Gordon, I had no idea a triangle could be so loud." I was beaming. The whole experience with the triangle that year made me realize that just because something is small doesn't mean it is unimportant or cannot have a huge effect. So in the spiritual life we may think that reading the bible won't help us, or that saying a little prayer won't change anything, or that coming to church to receive the Body and Blood of Christ won't do anything for us temporally or spiritually. They are all such small gestures aren't they? What can possibly come of them? But they do help us! Though small they accomplish big things! Jesus gives us an example if this in Matthew 17:20. "*Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.*" The little things that we do day in and day to practice our faith do indeed make a big difference in us. Just like the triangle! So let's keep doing them in faith, hope, and charity.

Faithfully, your priest,

J. Gordon Anderson

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Important News and Other Items

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

Sep 8th - Nativity of BVM

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Sep 14th - Holy Cross

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Sep 21st - St. Matthew

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Sep 23rd - Ember Friday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Sep 29th - St. Michael

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

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.

CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE: *Giving Up On God – A Commentary by Fr. Anderson*

In a recent issue of the Washington Examiner there was an article entitled “Americans Giving Up on God and Miracles.” It cited some research done by the Pew Research Center. *“Half of Americans who have left their church no longer believe in God, leading a surge of nearly one quarter of the nation who have no affiliation with any religion, according to a new survey.”* Interested why this has been happening, Pew went on to ask people what lead them to leave religion. *“About half of current religious ‘nones’ who were raised in a religion (49%) indicate that a lack of belief led them to move away from religion. This includes many respondents who mention ‘science’ as the reason they do not believe in religious teachings, including one who said ‘I’m a scientist now, and I don’t believe in miracles.’ Others reference ‘common sense,’ ‘logic’ or a ‘lack of evidence’ – or simply say they do not believe in God.”*

The other day I also watched a National Geographic documentary film on Islam. In it they interviewed an American woman from Austin, Texas who is a highly educated university professor in biology. She describes how she was reared Roman Catholic but began to question her faith when she couldn’t make heads or tails of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. *“If Jesus is God, then why does he pray to the Father?”* She asked. That question was what lead her on her journey to eventually convert to Islam.

These things probably sound very familiar to us. How many of us have relatives and friends and acquaintances who make similar statements, and who refuse to believe in God – or at least the Christian God – because they think it is irrational?

The problem I have with people who make statements like those above is that I highly doubt they have ever explored and studied the issues, as evidenced by their casual dismissal of God and religion. To say, for example, *“I’m a scientist now and I don’t believe in miracles,”* is to reveal an incredible lack of knowledge of the bible, the nature of miracles, philosophy, science itself, and scientific method. Volumes and volumes of scholarly books have been written explaining and exploring the connection between theology, and science. Anglican theologians such as E.L. Mascall, John Polkinghorne, Alistair McGrath, and Arthur Peacock (each of whom have strong backgrounds in science and who have made their living as scientists at one point or another) have made major contributions to this field of study.

While reading the works of these and other brilliant Christian scientist-theologians and the works in the philosophy of science (e.g. Kuhn’s “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions”) may still not convince the hardened atheist that the Christian God exists they would

at least come to understand that these questions are extremely complex and nuanced, and that theism is not entirely without merit. And they would probably grow in the virtue of humility too!

The case of the woman in Texas is interesting along similar lines. When people like her, or those in the Pew study, claim to have been raised Christian we have to wonder what is meant by that. Did they go to church every Sunday? Were they in a personal relationship with the Lord? Or were they Christmas and Easter Christians? Were they Christian simply because they were baptized and because they were not some other religion? Did they apply the same academic rigor as they do in their secular field of study to religious and philosophical matters? All of this is important when assessing their statements because it can show what level of knowledge they had of their religion before they decided to reject it. To say as she did that the the doctrine of the Trinity makes no sense is an intellectual cop out. For thousands of years theologians and philosophers have studied it, along with all of its implications. For the first 500 years of her existence the Church argued and debated this teaching before eventually hammering it all out. So to blithely dismiss this doctrine is in my opinion sheer intellectual and spiritual laziness.

The big problem today is that our culture has become incredibly dumbed down and quite intellectually slothful. When I ministered in a college town one of our student church members told me that I would be shocked to learn how many college students do not read. He went on to explain that they get by in their classes doing minimal to no reading, and read nothing for fun or to stay informed (e.g. newspapers, magazines, etc.). When I was in college a classmate complained to me about a professor who used “big words” in class. Nowadays higher education is so specialized that it is possible to get a Ph.D without ever studying languages or philosophy. Indeed, a number of years back a highly educated astronomer said to me, *“I have read hardly any philosophy.”*

God does not reward laziness. People will find God only if they seek him. (Jeremiah 29:13) And seeking God requires effort and concrete action. When we have questions about our faith we should search for answers instead of just giving up. There are answers. Faith and reason are not contradictory to one another. They are rather one faculty! What we find when we seek God, and look for answers to our questions, may surprise and challenge us. But we may be sure that it is right and good. May God keep our hearts and *minds* in true knowledge and love of him and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. ✠

SPIRITUALITY: *True Religion – A Commentary on the Collect for Trinity 7 by Bishop J.W.C. Wand*

“LORD of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

This is surely one of the most lovely collects in the book. The beauty of its phrasing is matched by the depth and soundness of religious feeling.

In its address it emphasizes both the power and the goodness of God. It carries over from the last collect (Trinity VI) the thought of the good things God holds in store for those who love him. It reminds us that he can not only create such things but bestow them on whom he will. He is the author and also the giver of all good things, and we are therefore happy to repose on his power.

We ask him for three things: first that he will graft in our hearts the love of his name. The name, as we know, stands for personality. We ask that love of him may be so grafted in our hearts that it may grow there and become part of our very being, as the twig becomes part of the tree into which it has been grafted.

We think of the glowing and tender hymns that have been written on this theme: Newton’s ‘How Sweet the name of Jesus sounds,’ Bernard’s (?) ‘Jesu, the very thought of thee,’ and Theoctistus’ ‘Jesu, name all names above,’ and we realize that such love of God is the very breath of adoration in the soul, without which all life would become void and meaningless.

We go on to ask that God will increase in us true religion. It is recognized that by his grace we already have the beginnings of true religion, but we want to grow in it, to become more and more mature, to advance further along the way of perfection into which he has called us.

We know that in all true religion there are two aspects: it looks to God on the one hand and to man on the other. Without both no religion can be ‘true.’ Without God it is uninspired: without man it is mere hypocrisy.

‘Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.’ We ask humbly that this all-round religion may steadily grow in us.

The third thing for which we ask is that we may be nourished in all goodness. It is a rather quaint thought that goodness is ‘nourishing,’ like plain and wholesome food. People are more inclined to think of religion as restrictive and repressive, a kind of spiritual slimming process. But actually it is the good person who is the sounder character, who gets more out of life, who enjoys better psychological health, who is in closer contact with every part of his environment.

If the life of Christ is really joined to ours, then it is his character that is reproducing itself in us. It grows by daily exercise in all godliness of living. Our prayers, sacraments, bible-reading, everything, in fact, that brings us in contact with God, is its regular sustenance. So the goodness in which, or on which, we are nourished is not our own but God’s. His goodness thus becomes ours – to the the glory of his own great name.

Those then are the three things for which we ask: love of God’s name, true religion, and the nourishment of his goodness. We conclude by asking him of his great mercy to keep us in the same.

We have complete confidence that he will do so. But we know that we must never presumptuously rely on the certainty of salvation. We know only too well the frailty of our nature. And so we ask him to keep our feet from straying, to maintain in us that good mind for which we have asked. Then we shall go from strength to strength, and our salvation will be a gradual growth in perfection. ✠

From “Reflections on the Collects” by J.W.C. Wand (A.R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1964)



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

Provincial Website

Have you ever visited our provincial website? The address is www.anglicanprovince.org Check it out from time to time, as news and event information and photos are posted there. You can read things like the bishop's charge to synod, updates on overseas missions, the prayer cycle, and more. You can also locate an APA church or a church in one of our sister jurisdictions to visit when you travel.

Help "Paint" Alban's Church

We are doing very well with our fundraiser to paint the church. At this point we are at about the halfway mark in fundraising. We hope to have the church painted in October. The scope has changed somewhat, however. Since the porches need some major repairs we will ask the contractor to exclude them from the project and instead hire someone to repair and repaint the porches separately. (Or just the former and we'll do the latter as a parish project.) This is going to cost us a little extra, so please be sure to keep the donations coming. Thank you for your generosity and care for God's house and your church! If you have any questions please see Fr. Anderson.

Deanery Meeting

On Thursday, September 29th (St. Michael and All Angels), Fr. Anderson, Fr. Edelman, and postulant Tyler Phass will be at Mt. Calvary Church in Lothian, Maryland for the fall deanery meeting. Fr. Anderson is dean of the mid-atlantic deanery, a subset within the diocese. Our deanery covers VA, MD, and PA. The topic of the meeting is the sacrificial nature of the priestly life. Please pray that we'd have a great, edifying meeting, the main point of which is to learn how to be better priests.

Please inform the rector...

if you are sick or going to be out of town so he does not get an ulcer worrying about why you are not in church! If you are sick please let him know immediately so he may pray for you and bring you Holy Communion.

Refreshment Hour

If you host coffee hour please remember not only to clean up afterwards but also to empty the trash can next to the table. The bag may be placed out back in one of the trash bins. If they do not get emptied they attract ants. We've had quite the ant problem lately because of this. Thank you!

Tuesday Night Study and Fellowship in October

Join us Tuesday nights in October as we watch "The World's Greatest Churches" by Professor William R. Cook. This DVD series from *The Teaching Company* is an in depth look at some of the most fantastic churches in Christendom, such as Hagia Sophia, the carved stone churches of Ethiopia, the stave churches of Norway, St. Peter's Basilica, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and more. Dr. Cook is an accomplished medievalist and a fascinating and dynamic lecturer. A number of years back we watched his series on the the great cathedrals of Europe and it was great. This promises to be just as good. There will be a sign up sheet in parish hall. We look forward to having you at this study!

The Centurion Recommends

Are you looking for a good movie to watch? Check out the acclaimed film "Ida" by Polish director Pawel Pawlikowski. Shot in 2013 in beautiful black and white, the story takes place in 1962 and is about a young orphan girl raised in a convent who is about to take vows to become a nun. But just before the big day her mother superior sends her off to meet with her only living relative, an aunt, who is a hardened communist bureaucrat judge. She learns from her aunt that she is Jewish! So the two of them take a journey together to find out what happened to their family members who were all killed in World War II, and to discover who they are and where they belong. Rent this incredibly gorgeous and moving film today!

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

"Money is like muck, no good except it be spread."

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