

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Years ago Dr. Seuss wrote the famous children's book "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." If any of his progeny are around and wish to write a sequel they might pen one called "How the Coronavirus Stole Lent." (Or, "...Our Lives", "Our Country", "Our Spirit"... chose whichever ending you want.) This has been a truly life-changing few weeks for the world! I believe that there is a message from God to us in all of this. Indeed he is always speaking to us through different sources, and in different ways. But how often do we *listen* when he speaks to us? Just as parents must sometimes raise their voices to get the attention of their children, so, it seems, God must sometimes "raise his voice" to get our attention. Maybe now he has gotten our attention. But what could he possibly be trying to tell us? Perhaps the same thing he has been trying to tell humanity ever since the day of the Fall: "You are not God! You are fragile human beings who can't live without me and my sustaining grace and presence. Repent! Return to me. Turn from your wickedness, and live lives of holiness, which befit you, the creation and children of God." How easy it is (especially as prosperous and secure Americans) to put our trust in ourselves, and think that we are invincible and above any sort of harm or danger. But then, one day, all of sudden, calamity and tragedy strike! And there we are... sitting in the ashes of what was once our lives wondering to ourselves or aloud, "How could this happen? How could this happen?" It is times like this, when we come face to face with the fragility of our being and world, that we are reminded that we need God in our lives. The sovereign Lord, the creator and sustainer of the universe and everything in it, has not left us to flounder amidst the hardships and troubles of this present world but himself became a man so that not only we, but the entire universe, could be recreated and restored in him. This life and everything in it is temporary, and fallen. As long as we are living in this world, and in these bodies, we will experience pain and tragedy. Even the people with the most security in the world —incredible wealth, excellent health and healthcare, a safe country and location in which to live, etc.— cannot escape the inevitable suffering that comes with this life. That's why we need God, and the grace, strength, and peace that he alone can give, every moment of our lives. The world around us can change in the twinkling of an eye. But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Hebrews 13:8) God is our "solid rock." (Psalm 18:2) We need to entrust every moment of every day of our lives to him so that when hardships arise we will not be carried away in a sea of despair. Be not afraid, my dear people! God will get us through this. Let us pray that he would deliver the world from this virus and give our leaders and scientists wisdom to handle the threat. And may many people repent and give their lives to God through Jesus Christ because of this incredible moment.

Faithfully, your priest, *J. Gordon Anderson*

April 2020

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UPCOMING SERVICES:

Apr 5th-11th - Holy Week

Services to be announced

Apr 25th - St. Mark

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 1st - Ss. Philip & James

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 18th-20th - Rogation Days

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 1st-2nd - Monday & Tuesday in Whitsun Week

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 11th - St. Barnabas

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 24th - St. John Baptist

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 29th - St. Peter

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 11th - St. Barnabas

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jul 2nd - Visitation BVM

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

CHRISTIAN LIVING: *Preparing for Our Future*

Years back I lead a memorial service for a wonderful parishioner who was probably in his late 40's or early 50's who died very suddenly, leaving behind a wife and three kids. His death was—and still is—shocking. In the remarks I offered at the service one of the things that I said was that we as Christians should always be prepared to die. Put another way, we need to always have our souls in such a state that we would be ready to meet God should he suddenly call us home.

This jumped to the forefront of my mind again as the coronavirus nightmare has taken hold upon us and spread across the globe. Will we be ready to meet God when he calls us home to him? If our lives are characterized by sin and indifference to him the answer is no. Hebrews 9:27 says, *"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."* After we die we will be judged by God according to how we have lived this life. What will he have to say about us and the choices that we have made? We need to strive to live holy lives by his grace, and put our complete trust in him and in his Son our Savior Jesus Christ, confessing our sins and failings to God and asking for forgiveness in the name of his Son, and for God's grace to live better lives... holy lives that befit the people of God.

But we need to be doing other things as well. Have we planned our funeral service? Perhaps there is a hymn that we especially love that we want sung at the funeral. Does anyone know about that besides us? If not, it will be hard to have that wish fulfilled. We might also want to have special music played at our funeral, or a certain scripture passage read. Have we met with the priest to plan our service so it's the way we want it? Don't forget to plan your funeral service with the rector.

Have we planned our estate? Do we have a will? Do we have life insurance so that our loved ones will not have to pay for our expenses out of their own pockets? Many families have to set up "GoFundMe" pages to help them when financial tragedy strikes due to an unexpected death. Life insurance is very cheap, all things considered. Do not leave your loved ones in the lurch should you suddenly die! And remember to calculate the amount your loved ones will need to pay for mortgages, bills, school, living, etc. Don't be uninsured and don't be underinsured!

Have we remembered to leave money to the church? Recently a longtime parishioner, Marcia Smithson, passed away, and she remembered the church by leaving us a life insurance policy. Because of her generosity and foresight the church has a bigger cushion to help weather these lean times and also continue planning for our future building project. We can likewise name the church as the beneficiary, or partial beneficiary, of a life insurance policy. And we can also name the church in our will so that she gets a portion of our estate. This is definitely something to consider. The church relies on her people to survive and fulfill her mission. It is part of our Christian duty to remember the church in our estates.

These are just a few important things to consider when looking ahead and planning for our future. We all try to plan for retirement, health needs, family, hobbies, etc. But we also need to plan to meet God, because one day that's going to happen. Is our heart right with God? Do we love him above all else and love our neighbor as ourself? Do we trust in Jesus Christ alone for our eternal salvation, and, repenting of our sins and turning to him in faith, give ourselves wholly to him? May, by God's grace, the answer to that question be YES! ☩

 WEIRD FACTS: *The Origin of the Word "Quarantine"*

According to a recent article by a prominent medievalist in the Wall Street Journal the word "quarantine" originated in late medieval Venice. At one point another outbreak of the plague occurred in Europe and around the Mediterranean, and the people of Venice, despite precautions, kept getting affected by it. The city leaders determined that the plague was probably coming in on ships, so they made ships and their crews stop off at an island for a period of "forty days" ("quaranta" in Latin) before they were allowed to enter the Venetian city-state. The time period of "forty days" was chosen entirely for its biblical significance. This seemed to do the trick for Venice at that point in history. ☩

SPIRITUALITY: *The Sacrifice of the Mass*, by the Rev'd Canon Glenn M. Spencer

And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and our bodies, to a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee...

The phrase above is taken from the Order of Holy Communion in the Book of Common Prayer on page 81. We know sacrifice to be our bounden duty and service; it is an indelible mark of what it means to be a Christian. From the first generation Church in Jerusalem to our day, this Christological principle of self-sacrificing love has been the *sine quo non* of our Common Life in Christ. In every age, in every place, and in whatever jurisdiction, the Church has tried to live up to Christ's pattern of sacrificial love. Our job today is first, to discern what the actual sacrifice is, and then, to offer it up. This has been the question that has driven much of the conversation between the clergy and laity of our parish over the last several weeks.

This sacrifice is different from those of the past. We are not being persecuted for our Faith. And we are not living in the Middle Ages when they did not have hospitals, and the Church had to invent them. We have brilliant medical professionals, and many of them are orthodox Christians, and many of them are your fellow parishioners. They know what they are doing, they know what we should do, and we need to pay attention to them. In doing so, we are now entering into an additional 30 days of sheltering in place. It is an obligation laid upon us all, absolutely necessary, to save the lives of the most vulnerable among us as well as our neighbor.

What specifically is our sacrifice? The sacrifice of the Church of God today is that we cannot come together for the celebration of the Blessed Sacrament. This quarantine is not something that we have chosen, and neither is it an instrument of tyranny enacted by Caesar against the Church. Think of it rather as a nationwide pro-life action. We all miss one another, and we all yearn for the Holy Communion. It is beginning to hurt, and we may begin to feel unmoored and at sea. This begins to feel like a real sacrifice. But the whole world is now in a struggle with a lethal virus, and the only way we can save lives is by following the protocol given to us by our medical professionals.

I submit that those leaders of the Church who flaunt these protocols are morally culpable for the deaths of the people they encourage to gather anyway. Furthermore, they should be required to pay for the medical expenses of those who attend their services and gatherings and become ill. Also, it is rather

astonishing that just when we should be championing the care and protection of the weakest among us, some Christians are recommending that we actually sacrifice the weak and the elderly for the good of the economy. It is further ironic that many of these teachers have cited Cyprian's response to the great plague of his day, while urging Christians to ignore the dangers and care for the dying. Actually there's nothing in Cyprian's sermon on the plague of 251 about caring for the dying; rather, Cyprian basically says bad things happen to people all the time, and Christians should not think they are exempt from every state and condition of man, Christian or not. Nor should we personally worry over dying from the plague, or anything else, because when we die we go to heaven. I don't doubt that Christians under the care of Bishop Cyprian did in fact take care of the sick and dying, but he doesn't emphasize that.

It was Dionysius of Alexandria, who along with his college of clergy and laity, cared for the sick and dying in a plague that ravaged Alexandria in 252, and they did so because they took it as their duty to God to care for all men whether they were Christian or not. The pagans did not consider it a duty to God or man to nurse the sick and dying. Dionysius describes the situation in which, "at the first onset of the disease, they (the pagans) pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest... hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease; but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape." In his Easter Letter in 260, he described the work of his Churches during the plague: *Most of our brother-Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of the danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains.*

In Dionysius' day there were no hospitals, no CDC, no programs to care for the sick, much less the dying. The Church had to invent them. And that she did, and out of her actions over hundreds and hundreds of years have grown all across the world the medical arts and great universities that train men and women in those arts. We cannot return to Dionysius' day when the medical arts did not exist in order to replicate the work of the Church in 252 A.D. in Alexandria — that is pure fantasy.

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We have a contemporary office, a present day duty to God to love one another as well as to love our neighbor by following the universal protocols presented to us by medical professionals. We love the Blessed Sacrament and we are bound to it, and Christ our God gives himself to us concretely and visibly in the un-bloody sacrifice of every Mass. But Jesus is not bound and limited to the Blessed Sacrament. We will not gather together at our old familiar altar on Easter Sunday morning — and that is the global state of Christendom. The whole Church, divided for millennia, is now united as one, really real, global, living Sacrifice. This is our existential, real-life sacrifice and oblation. It is not our duty at this time to figure out ways to avoid the sacrifice, even though we know that what we long for is the truly good. This is a dreadful sacrifice, but we are not abandoned by Christ our God. And I submit to you that what we are now called to do is to embrace this sacrifice as courageously as blessed Ignatius embraced the wild beasts in the arena of Rome. Embrace the sacrifice and offer it up to our Lord: “And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls, and our bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee...” The Liturgy of the Spiritual Communion is an instrument by which you may over and over again offer up yourselves to

the Father of our Lord Jesus. And as I have said before, please remember that even though that sacrifice is really real, and truly happening in our homes as we are quarantined, they are not merely a myriad of individualistic, atomistic sacrifices, but as the BCP puts it, our many sacrifices offered up become “a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee.” The many become one. We are like so many grains of wheat being crushed, and by the grace of Christ we are offered up as one Loaf to the Father. Today is our day. Now is our moment to live faithfully to Christ, to do good to all men, and to pray for the salvation of the whole world. We will continue to teach, to pray, and to offer up the Mass at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday Mornings. But the doors will not be open. We are asking our parishioners to stay home and to continue to say Morning Prayer and the Liturgy for Spiritual Communion each Sunday at 10:00 a.m. This coming Sunday is Palm Sunday, the harbinger of the end of Lent. But as it turns out, this season has become and will continue to be a shrunken season for us all: shrunken of palms, shrunken of the close physical presence of one another, and shrunken of the Sacrament of Sacraments, the Holy Eucharist. But be sure of this: we are not shrunken of Christ and his love for us. ☩

SEMINARIAN UPDATE: *Monthly Update from the Rev'd Mason Waldbauer*

Dear Friends,

What a strange season we're in right now! I'm praying for you all during this anxious time. Talk about giving things up for Lent. We've given up much of our normal personal lives and our life together as a Church, especially as we're about to enter into Holy Week. The way of life here at seminary has changed completely. Thankfully, things have been good here at Nashotah House, and everyone has remained healthy so far. It's been three weeks now since we have moved everything online, and it's very strange. It feels like my seminary career—or at least its social aspects and chapel life—has ended very abruptly and without any warning. I didn't realize, for instance that the Third Sunday of Lent would be my final Mass in person as a student here. When the social-distancing began, we thought it would be much more temporary. Our chapel services have moved to being live-streamed only; and at one point, the priest would bring the sacrament to our houses; but now even that has stopped. Nobody's required to leave campus, and so mostly everyone has decided to stay, and we still see each other out for walks; but there aren't any get togethers, and we only get to hang out after class on the video calls. This time has made me especially thankful that I've been able to attend a seminary residentially. A lot of guys need to do online programs; and experiencing that now makes me really thankful for the friendships, the special moments in chapel, and the conversations with faculty which are really only possible in this sort of residential program. It feels very strange to have to say goodbye to each of these things now prematurely. The social distancing hasn't left me that lonely, thankfully. I'm not stir crazy yet, and I only need to make it one more month! I go outside for walks often and have caught up with some friends at six feet apart. People are

taking the social distancing directives really seriously. The girl I'm going out with lives in the apartment right behind me, and she's made for a good quarantine buddy. She's a first-year student here. We decided to pair up and just see each other and social-distance from others. It feels like that Seinfeld episode where Jerry goes on a trip with his girlfriend—a “dating decathlon” which in a really short time shows you where the relationship would be months down the road. It's nice having somebody to eat dinner with each night. All this extra time has made me really productive. My apartment is cleaner than it's ever been before. I've gotten some extra time for these practice masses I need to prepare for. In my office, I took down one of my closet doors (one of those sliding wooden doors, you know?) and set it up on top of my desk and an end table to make for a practice altar. My mom just asked me on the phone when I'm going to do a live stream. My other work has been really manageable given all the extra time. I just got word that the Lambeth Conference has been postponed a year; so I'm not sure what that means for my little seminar group and our presentation, whether we'll be going next year or not. My graduation date has been postponed until September 24. And things are pretty up in the air about when I'll move out and whether I'll be back in Baltimore at all or go straight out to Denver for my curacy. It's all up in the air as I'm sure many things are for you, too, at this time. I hope you're able to have a very meaningful Holy Week and Easter celebration despite our separateness. I have a monk friend who always signs off his emails with “united in prayer,” and I've started using that. It feels very apropos at this time, because it is true, and I will be reminding myself of this in the days ahead. Praying for your health and peace.

Deacon Mason