

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

Volume XXVIII, Number 5

May 2021



May 2021

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is *The Ascension of Christ* by Giacomo Cavedone. Completed about 1640, it is oil on a copper plate, measuring 22.4"x16.8". It is on display at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in California. It portrays the Apostles and two women, undoubtedly the Blessed Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, assembled as Christ is taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9). The woman on the left would be his mother, as blue is the traditional color for her robe.

Forty days after the Resurrection Christ assembled the Apostles and his other loyal followers and told them to stay in Jerusalem. Still not understanding, they asked him if now was the time he would expel the Romans and restore Israel to her former greatness (1:6). They still believed that that was the mission of the Messiah. He told them that it was for only the Father to know what was to come, and promised that he would send the Holy Spirit, who would lead them to all truth. He was then taken up from them in a cloud. Thirteen days later, on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, his promise was fulfilled. The Holy Spirit revealed to them the Faith, along with sufficient understanding to be able to begin to gain a full grasp of it.

Giacomo Cavedone (1577-1660) was an Italian Baroque painter of the Bolognese School. He was born near Moderna, where he apprenticed under Bernardino Baldi and Annibale Carracci. In 1609 he studied in Rome for a year under Guido Reni, and in 1612 he worked in Venice, where he became one of Ludovico Carracci's main assistants. He remained with Carracci when he returned to Bologna, and upon Carracci's death in 1619 he became *Caposindaco* of the *Accademia degli Incamminati*, one of Italy's first art academies. His adult life bore

The Epistle is published monthly except August by Saint James' Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470-0446, the Rev. R. R. Losch, Editor, email rlosch33@gmail.com, Phone 205-499-0968. Copr. © 2021, Richard R. Losch. Permission is granted to reproduce text items in parish newsletters or bulletins (but not on the Internet or digitized) as long as they are reproduced completely and in print, and credit is given.

a series of calamities. In 1623 he fell from a church scaffold and was partially crippled for the rest of his life. In 1628 his wife was accused of witchcraft. She was exonerated, but in 1630 she and their children died of the plague. He was never recognized as a master in his own lifetime, and in 1630 he died in poverty, but by the 18th century his genius was recognized and appreciated. His later works show a strong influence from Ludovico Carracci. While many of his students went on to fame, none were acknowledged as great masters.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

One of the reasons we so strongly encourage regular Bible reading is that we frequently will read a passage that we have read a dozen times before, and something brand new will jump out and catch our attention. One that caught mine recently was when on the evening of the Resurrection the two disciples from Emmaus rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the others that “the Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon” (Lk. 24:34). His appearance to Simon Peter hardly seems unexpected, but as we think about it, it must have been one of the most awkward confrontations in the Bible. The last time that Peter saw Jesus was three days earlier in the courtyard of Caiaphas’ house. He had cursed and three times denied even knowing who Jesus was. Then Jesus was led into the courtyard, the cock crowed for the second time, and Jesus simply turned and looked at Peter and then went on with his guards.

Each of us at one time or another has done something rash, stupid and very hurtful to someone we love. It is hard enough to face them afterward, but when they do not condemn us, it is even harder. It is difficult to imagine that meeting. After the first moment of elation at seeing Jesus alive (all he had seen so far was the empty tomb), it would have crashing down on him what he had done. He had to look face-to-face at the one whom he had vehemently denied, and who knew it. That must have been an interesting conversation to say the least.

It is said that when a broken bone heals, its strongest part is the place where it had been broken. So it is with relationships. A broken relationship that has been healed with repentance and forgiveness is often stronger than it was before the offense that broke it. It will never be exactly the same as it was before, but it will be stronger and often better. It may be that Peter's denial was part of God's plan from the beginning. Never again would Peter be tempted to boast that he was one of the first chosen, or that Jesus had called him the Rock and given him the keys to the Kingdom. He would remember that he had denied Jesus, yet in spite of that Jesus still loved him and led him to the leadership of his Church. Because of that incident his true strength rose from humility instead of his perceived strength humiliating him. This is why the Church emphasizes self-examination, repentance and confession. The humiliation of confronting our sins and accepting God's forgiveness builds our strength.

Father Rick Losch+

Forward Day by Day

The new *Forward Day by Day* daily devotional booklets for May, June and July are available on the table in the vestibule. In addition to the small booklets we have large print editions available. Please feel free to take either size.

Hiram Patrenos

The Epistle is Online

The last eight years of *The Epistle* are now online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the "Epistle" tab at the top. On a mobile device, click on the blue menu at the top right and select the "Epistle" page. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file. This is an easy way to share articles with others.

Richard R. Losch+

What if there were no hypothetical questions?

YouTube Videos

If you missed one of my Sunday YouTube homilies or want to go back to re-listen to one, they are all available on my website at www.rlosch.com. That is easier than trying to search for a particular one on YouTube.

Richard R. Losch+

Getting Back to Normal

While it remains to be seen what true “normal” will be in the post-Covid era, we are slowly returning to more-or-less what we had in the Church before the pandemic changed our lives so radically. Governor Ivey has lifted the mask mandate in Alabama, yet the Biden administration still requires it in all Federal properties (under a severe penalty). Bishop Curry recognizes that local parishes vary considerably in their facilities and basic natures. She has been lenient in that she has left many of the decisions of returning to normal up to the local parishes. She requires only two things—that we continue “social distancing” and the wearing of masks, and that we use our heads. The latter is the more difficult, because common sense is often a rare commodity in today’s world. We answer to the bishop before we answer to the government, however, so even though masks are no longer mandated by Alabama, we ask your continued cooperation in wearing them in church and in waiting until you are outside to visit after the services.

We have resumed singing a couple of hymns (admittedly singing is not as enjoyable with a mask on, but so be it), and before long we will be back to the full music on Sundays. All we ask is that you bear with us and be patient as we work our way back to the future.

Richard R. Losch+

You can say any foolish thing to a dog, and he will give you a look that says, “Wow, you’re right! I never would’ve thought of that!”

—Dave Barry

Be Wordly Wise

Easter

Many people accuse Easter of being derived from a pagan feast, basing that claim on the mistaken belief that the word Easter is a variant of the Middle Eastern *Ishtar* or the Celtic *Oestre* both of whom were pagan fertility goddesses. In fact, although the words sound similar, they have no relationship to the name Easter. It appropriately derives from the Proto-German *Austron*, sunrise. This evolved into the modern German *Ostern*, Easter, and came into Old English via Saxon as the word we use today, Easter. In most languages the name of the feast is based on the Hebrew *Pesach* (פסח), Passover, and takes a form similar to *Pascha*. This is true even in most of the Germanic family of languages (which includes English), although English and German are exceptions. English-speaking missionaries have also had their influence. For example, in Japanese Easter is *Isuta* and in Thai it is *Xistexr* (*Histehr*), although in most other Asian languages it is a variation of *Pascha*.

Richard R. Losch+

Christian Anti-Semitism: An Oxymoron

One cannot be a Christian and an anti-Semite at the same time. You cannot go to church and worship Jesus Christ, who died a faithful Jew, and listen to the teachings of Saint Paul, the Apostles and the Evangelists, who died faithful Jews, and also hate Jews. While there was tension in Paul's time between the Jews who accepted Jesus as the Christ and the Jews who did not, there was not a formal parting of the ways between the two until decades later. I have often heard people say, "But Saint Paul was a Christian!" No, he was not. There was no such thing as a Christian until decades later. Even though the followers of Jesus were called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26), that was a name given to those who considered themselves a sect of Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah. As Gentiles joined the following, the question was not whether the Jews had left their faith, but whether the Gentiles had to become Jews before

they could be accepted into it. In time there was a parting between Jews and Christians after which the two would be seen as separate religions, but that would not be until much later.

Anti-Semitism did not originate with Christianity—it was strong long before the time of Christ—but to our shame we Christians honed it to a fine art centuries ago. Much of this is the result of a gross misunderstanding of the gospels' accounts of the Passion of Christ. There are several passages in which we are told that the Jews wanted him put to death, that they conspired against him, that they paid Judas to betray him, and so on and on. We are also told in many places that the disciples were “in fear of the Jews.” The Greek is *hoi Joudaioi* (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι). A literal translation is “the Jews,” but this does not convey its real meaning. In almost every case, when the New Testament refers to the Jews it does not mean the Jewish people, but the Jewish leadership, particularly the Temple authorities. The Temple leaders held not only the religious leadership of the people, but also full governmental authority beneath only that of Rome and its Jewish appointees. With a few exceptions (like Nicodemus) they were a corrupt lot who had sold out to the Romans for power and wealth. These men, not the common people, were Jesus' enemies. Many of the common people were, in fact, his loyal followers. Like any large crowd anywhere, however, they could be whipped into a mob frenzy by clever manipulators. That is exactly what happened in the Praetorium when the crowd responded to agitators strategically placed among them, and took up the cry, “Crucify him!”¹ The same is true when they said, “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Mt. 27:25). That was the mob picking up on the cry that the agitators had begun, but sad to say that line has been

¹ Mob psychology is amazing. I once saw an interview with a woman in the German Resistance in the early days of the Nazi regime. Three million people were at the 1933 Nazi rally at Nurnberg. She went there to observe, and was revolted by the frenzied cheering of the people as Hitler, Hess and Goering walked the half mile to the speaker's platform. She threw up when she suddenly realized that she, too, was screaming, “Sieg heil!”

used for almost two thousand years since to justify persecution of the Jews. Any frenzied crowd at any time in any part of the world could have been stirred up to say the same thing, but countless Jews have suffered at the hands of countless ignorant Christians for it ever since.

Anti-Semitism has no more place in civilized society than has racism, sexism, religious bigotry or any other of the myriad hatreds that divide us in today's world. Tragically, however, it is not only increasing throughout the world, it seems to be increasingly tolerated in our own country. Statements against the Jews have been made by some of our religious and political leaders that would elicit outrage if they were made about any other religious, ethnic or racial group. It resurged the same way in Europe a century ago. It was manipulated and encouraged by evil people, and the climax of that was the Holocaust. The cry has gone up, "Never again!" That will be an empty cry if we as Christians fail to do our part in speaking out and acting against anti-Semitism. One cannot be a Christian and also support anti-Semitism actively or by silence. It is a clear choice.

Richard R. Losch+

Earliest Human Symbol

One of the earliest symbols carved by humans ever found has been discovered in the Ramie region of Israel. It is carved on an auroch bone that is about 120,000 years old.¹ State-of-the-art scientific analysis has shown that the carvings were made when the bone was relatively fresh, and was made with a flint tool by a right-handed person in one sitting. It is the oldest symbolic engraving ever found in the Levant.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Aurochs were fierce wild cattle. Although they were the ancestors of modern domestic cows, they were vicious, and were about the size of an elephant. In the Bible, "wild ox" actually means auroch. Despite attempts to save them, including hunting restrictions, the last aurochs went extinct in Poland in 1627. This was probably the first extinction that humans were aware of and tried to prevent.

Cain and Abel

The story of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1-9) has fascinated and haunted people for thousands of years. It raises more questions than it provides answers, and yet it can teach us a number of powerful lessons, whether we accept the story literally or allegorically. According to Genesis, the brothers Cain and Abel were the first two children conceived and born on earth, after their parents Adam and Eve had been expelled from Paradise. The Bible tells us nothing about their childhood or their relationship—whether there was a close fraternal bond or sibling rivalry—but the *Midrashim*¹ suggest that they were close, and that Cain taught Abel how to sacrifice to God. On the other hand, Cain was a farmer and Abel was a herdsman. Since the prehistoric beginning of agriculture and husbandry there has been tension between farmers and herdsmen, and agrarian readers in every generation would have understood that. Some say that the farmer/herdsman tension is because of Cain and Abel, but simple observation would make quite clear the practical reasons for it.² This may be the Bible's way of suggesting that there was a standing tension between Cain and Abel.

The Law would not be given until the time of Moses many generations later, so there was no fixed rule on how or what to sacrifice. Reason, however, would have told them that what

¹ The *Midrashim* (מדרשים) (plural of *Midrash*) are a collection of centuries of ancient rabbinic interpretations of the Bible that suggest a great deal of information that the Bible does not supply. It is believed that they were written primarily as homiletic (teaching and preaching) aids.

² Farms require fixed areas to till and plant, while sheep need large territories in which to wander and forage. Farms, especially if they are fenced, are often barriers to the roaming of the flocks, and grazing sheep trample and eat the crops. Also, while cattle eat only the surface leaves of grass, sheep eat to the root, making the pastures useless for the grazing of cattle until the following year. For these reasons farmers and herdsmen have always been at enmity with each other. This goes right into modern times in the American Old West with the range wars between farmers, cattle ranchers, and sheep herders.

they offered should be only of the best. We are not told why God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's, but we are given a pretty good clue. Cain is angry about the rejection, and God responds to his anger saying, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (4:7). It was apparently not Cain's offering so much as his attitude that God rejected. Perhaps he had held back the very best for himself, or had offered only what he could easily spare rather than giving generously. Either way, it is more likely that it was not the sacrifice that was inadequate, but Cain himself, and he blamed his brother Abel more than he blamed himself or God.

Cain's intent to harm Abel seems to be premeditated. He did not simply pick up a rock in a moment of rage and strike him without thinking. Rather, he said, "Let us go out to the field," and once there he rose up and killed him" (4:8). This raises an interesting question: did Cain have any idea what would happen if he hit Abel with a rock? They had certainly experienced pain from accidents and injuries growing up, but up to that time no human had ever died. Did Cain have any idea that hitting Abel would end his life?¹ On the other hand they had observed death in animals—Abel had to kill the lambs in order to offer God "the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions" (4:4). Again, whether we take this story literally or allegorically, it is noteworthy that the first death in human history was a murder.

Several Midrash commentaries suggest that Abel's behavior might have instigated his murder. Some imply that he was arrogant and taunted his older brother with God's rejection of his offering.² Another says that they were rivals in love with their sister, and another says that Abel challenged Cain because Cain had taken possession of all the land. None of these conjectures are either supported or contradicted by any statements

¹ When God told Adam not to eat the fruit lest he would surely die, it would have been reasonable for Adam to have asked, "What is 'die'?"

² Joseph's arrogance and tattling ended up with his older brothers plotting to kill him and finally selling him into slavery.

in the Bible. The Talmud says that Abel must have been a sinner and thus worthy of death, since death is the reward of sin. Both Jewish and Christian theology, however, say that all humans are sinners by virtue of the fall of Adam. On that basis Abel would have died sooner or later anyway, so that argument cannot be used to justify Cain's killing him.

The Hebrew in verse 4:8 is archaic and is not clear. While it is usually rendered, "Now Cain said to Abel, let us go out to the field," some translators render it, "And Cain spoke with Abel. And when they were in the field..." While the former is the more likely and more common translation, the question nonetheless remains, what did they talk about? If the latter is the correct rendering, then it is possible that Abel said something that so infuriated Cain that he killed him in a fit of rage, and not with premeditation. We cannot be sure either way.

All things considered, there are no exculpatory circumstances to remove from Cain the charge that he is the archetypal murderer. If he had challenged God and even vented his anger at him, he would have been forgiven. The Bible is full of people who at one time or another were angry with God, and many of us have experienced that. Cain's sin was that he could not "get back at" God, so he took out his anger on the nearest person to him, his younger brother. When he asked God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" the answer is a resounding "Yes."

There are four main lessons that we can learn from this story. First, ignorance is not an excuse. "I didn't know what I was doing" does not exonerate us from what we have done. Even if he did not know the meaning of death, Cain knew that striking Abel would harm him. Secondly, we cannot excuse our sin by saying to God, "If you didn't want me to do it, you should have stopped me." The third is that we must always be on guard, because we are always in danger of losing control. Two men can be brothers and love one another, yet one can destroy the other. And finally, as Elie Wiesel reminded us, he who kills anyone, kills his own brother.

Richard R. Losch+

Will the Real Philistine Please Stand Up

History is written by the winners and survivors, and it is rarely kind to the losers. Mention the word Philistine and the first thing that comes to mind is an aggressive, crass, barbaric and uncultured warrior. For centuries, almost all we knew about the Philistines, the “Sea People,” was what was recorded by their enemies, the Egyptians and the Israelites. Modern archaeology has exonerated them and has shown them to be an amazing and highly cultured people, but the negative image of them is still very much alive. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a Philistine as “a person who is guided by materialism and is usually disdainful of intellectual and artistic values.”

The first breakthrough in our knowledge of the Philistines outside of what the Bible tells of them came in 1821, when the French archaeologist Jean-François Champollion deciphered ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics recording the attack of the “Sea People,” among whom were the *prst*, the Philistines. The Egyptians defeated and repelled them, but then allowed them to settle in Canaan on the east end of the Mediterranean. They subdued a significant portion of the coastal area, but we do not know what they called themselves. Long after they had disappeared the Greek historian Herodotus (d. 320 BC) called them *Palastinoi*, based on the Hebrew *Plashtim* (פלשתים), which is translated Philistines. The area they conquered was in the southern part of what was later the Roman province of Syria, and the Romans called it Syria Palestina. The term was not used to identify a nation or defined territory, but simply designated a region, much as we use the term “Middle West.” It subsequently came to be known in English as Palestine.

It the past hundred years, extensive archaeological research has uncovered a great many Philistine cities and villages, including five that are named in the Bible.¹ From these discoveries we have learned much about the Philistines.

¹ Called the Philistine Pentapolis, these are Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gaza, Ekron and Gath. Gath, the home of Goliath, was discovered in 2016.

In the latter half of the 13th century BC the Levant was controlled by the two world superpowers, the Egyptians and the Hittites (based in modern Turkey). Soon thereafter, however, each was entering a period of relative weakness both politically and militarily, and waves of people from the Aegean took advantage of their weakness.¹ These were called at the time the Sea People, and one group of them was what we now call the Philistines. At that same time, the Israelites were beginning their conquest of Canaan. Canaan was a confederation of city-states ranging from modern Lebanon to the Sinai Peninsula, and east to modern Jordan. In the 12th century BC the Philistines, who had been defeated by Rameses III, were permitted by him to settle on the west coast of Canaan, which was a vassal of Egypt. In order to settle they had to take the land from the Canaanites, which they proceeded to do. At the same time the Israelites under Joshua's command were invading Canaan's southeastern frontiers. The Israelites conquered most of Canaan with the exception of the coastal area around what is today called the Gaza Strip. That remained firmly in the hands of the Philistines until they were finally defeated by King David in the early 10th century. During the period of the Judges (the era preceding the rise of the monarchy under King Saul), as well as under Saul's reign, the Philistines held a much stronger hand than the Israelites, and effectively ruled Canaan with the exception of the mountainous strip in the middle of the land, where the Israelites held control and waged guerilla warfare. After the Philistines killed King Saul and his son Jonathan, David came to the throne and united the twelve Israelite tribes, forming the United Monarchy of Israel. Soon thereafter Israel had become strong enough for David to subdue the Philistines completely, and in time they all but disappeared. A handful remained in the region of the Gaza Strip, and a few

¹ This was at the time of the Egyptian pharaoh Rameses III (r. 1186-1155 BC), the last pharaoh to hold supreme power over all Egypt. Egypt had reached its greatest height under Rameses II (1279-1213 BC, not relate to Rameses III), who is thought to be the pharaoh at the time of the Exodus.

more in the area around Phoenicia (modern Lebanon), but they were no longer any threat to Israel. Eventually they were absorbed into the local populations.

When the Philistines invaded Egypt in Rameses III's time it was in the region of modern Lebanon on down to the Gaza Strip. This was technically part of Egypt at that time. From the Egyptian description, it is apparent that they had a sophisticated infantry and chariotry, even though they were ultimately defeated by the superior Egyptian military. They also brought with them a large number of non-combatants, including women and children. This indicates that this was not just an aggressive raid, but they intended to settle on the land they conquered. Rameses, as an act of mercy, allowed them to settle there as long as they stayed away from Egypt proper. He wrote an inscription as follows:

“I [Ramesses III] extended all the frontiers of Egypt and overthrew those who had attacked them from their lands. ... I settled them in strongholds, bound in my name. Their military classes were as numerous as hundred thousands. I assigned portions for them all with clothing and provisions from the treasuries and granaries every year.”

Egyptian images show that each of the Sea Peoples had a unique headdress. That of the Philistines was a headband festooned with uprights of some kind—perhaps leather straps or feathers—that looked like a crown. Several of these have been found in archaeological digs in Canaan, showing the Philistine influence on the Canaanites. Their dress was a short kilt and a ribbed breastplate almost identical to those worn in Cyprus, thus confirming the belief that they came from the Aegean.

Despite the image of the Philistines as barbarians, they were in fact a highly cultured people. Ashkelon, on the east Mediterranean coast, was not only a major seaport, but also an important mercantile center. Its neighboring city, Ashdod, is best known in the Bible as the place where the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant at the Battle of Ebenezer (1 Sam. 5:1). Ashdod was the home of one of the two temples of Dagon, their chief god. Each of the five cities of the Philistine

Pentapolis was actually an independent city-state ruled by a prince (although the ruler of Gath called himself a king (1 Sam. 21:11)). We know little about whether there was any confederated government, or if so, how much power it had. From the biblical accounts it seems that the Philistine rulers did not have absolute power over major political or military decisions.

By the 11th century BC the Philistines had absorbed much of the Canaanite religion. However, the Canaanites, a Semitic people, practiced circumcision while the Philistines did not (1 Sam 18:27). Their chief god was Dagon, but they also worshipped the Canaanite god Moloch, to whom the Canaanites sacrificed children. While there is no mention of it in the Bible, archaeology has shown that an important Philistine goddess in their early days was the Aegean “Great Mother,” along with a number of other female deities. By the 11th century the predominant deity was Dagon, whose temple Samson destroyed.

The most thoroughly excavated Philistine site is at Ashdod. It was a well-planned city, with a government area, a market, temples, and clearly defined industrial and residential areas. Contrary to the negative image that the modern adjective “philistine” evokes, the Philistines’ culture was well above that of most of their neighbors. Their ceramics were sophisticated and beautifully artistic, and in time influenced pottery throughout the Near East. They also had highly refined sculpture, architecture and painting. Their burial rites were complex, including anthropoid clay coffins that were sculptured and beautifully painted (an Egyptian influence). Little has been found in the field of literature or music, but since such relics are often quite ephemeral it is hard to say much about these, one way or the other. It is reasonable, however, that with such a large body of sophisticated art we could also expect fine literature and music.

In short, the Philistines were far from being barbarians. Despite the Bible’s negative view of them, it is fair to say that they were a highly civilized and cultured people.

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

Leo, the roaring lion that opens every MGM production, was created in 1916 by the MGM publicist Howard Dietz. A Columbia graduate, Dietz based it on the Columbia Lions' mascot. It originated in the days of silent films, so in 1927 when "talkies" came in, they had to give Leo a roar. After a long search they settled on the roar of a lion named Stephen in the Dublin Zoo. Stephen's throaty roar is still heard today in all MGM productions.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



"Yo, Mom, your greatest achievement in life is off to school."



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