

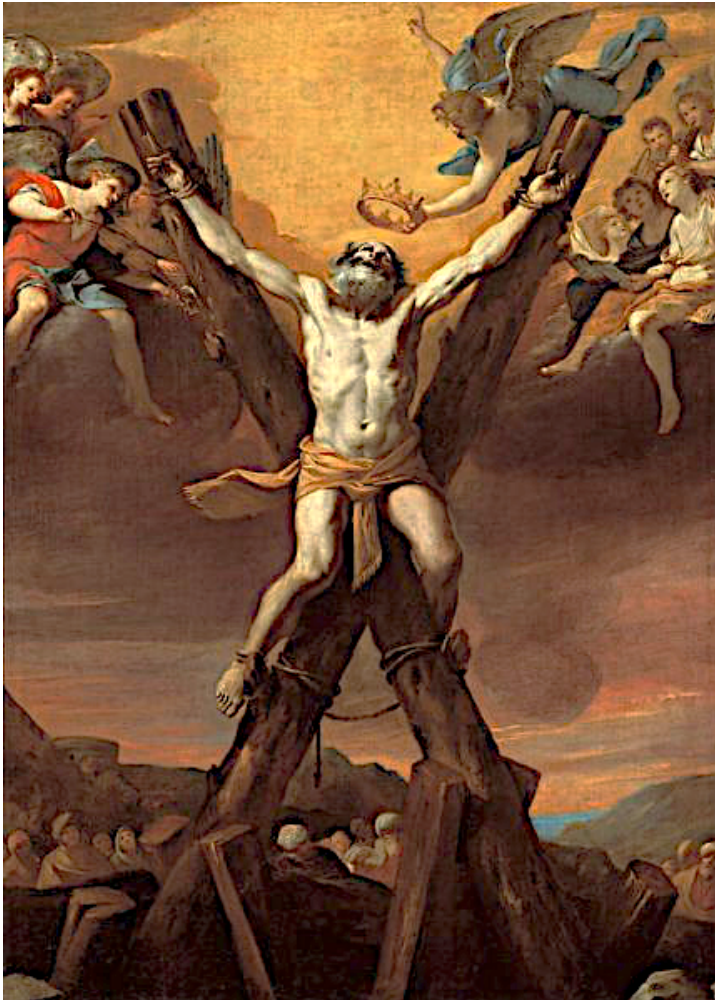
THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



Volume XXIV, Number 10

November 2017



November 2017

This Month's Cover

Our cover painting this month is *The Crucifixion of Saint Andrew* by Mattia Preti, completed in 1651. It is oil on canvas, and although we could not find its dimensions, it is an enormous painting. It is the full reredos behind the high altar at the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle in Rome. We selected it in honor of the Feast of Saint Andrew the Apostle on November 30.

Saint Andrew was the first Apostle called by Jesus. He was the brother of Saint Peter, and he and Peter were disciples of John the Baptist. After Jesus called him to follow him, he brought Peter to him. Although he was the first called, he was for the most part outshone by Peter, James and John, and is primarily remembered as Peter's brother rather than for his own accomplishments. After the Resurrection Andrew preached mainly in Thrace, where he was finally martyred. Very ancient tradition says that he was crucified on an X-shaped cross (the Romans were ingenious at dreaming up new ways to entertain the bloodthirsty general populace). In the painting an angel is crowning him as a saint. In heraldry an X-shaped cross is known as a saltire, and it appears in many heraldic devices. Saint Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland, so the flag of Scotland is a white saltire on a sky blue background. When Scotland and England joined to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain, the saltire of Scotland was incorporated with the red Cross of Saint George the British flag.

Mattia Preti (1613-1699) was an Italian Baroque artist born in Taverna in Calabria, the very southernmost part of the Italian boot. Although he is generally associated with Naples, he was known as *Il Cavalier Calabrese* (the Calabrian Knight) because he was a member of the Order of Saint John, known

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 rlsch33@gmail.com, Phone 205-499-0968. Copyright © 2017 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.

as the Knights of Malta. He apprenticed with Giovanni Battista Caracciolo, “the Caravaggist,” and thus throughout his career his paintings showed a strong influence of Caravaggio. He then studied and worked in Rome for several years, where he associated with and learned from many of the great 17th century Italian masters. From Rome he went to Naples, where he spent many years, maintaining a very successful career. In 1659 he was made a Knight of Grace in the Order of Saint John, and went to the order’s headquarters in Malta to receive the honor. He spent most of the rest of his life in Malta. He did many paintings there, many of which are now in private collections on Malta. He also did paintings and frescoes in several churches there, including the Co-Cathedral in Valetta. Preti had a long and successful career, producing a huge number of paintings and frescoes in the vigorous Baroque style. His paintings are exhibited in museums all over the world, most of them being in Naples, Valetta, and his home town of Taverna de Calabria. He died on January 3, 1699, and is buried in Valetta on Malta.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word From the Editor

Deuteronomy 30: 19 says, “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.” While this passage is commonly quoted as an anti-abortion slogan, what it actually meant is something quite different and even more important. Choosing life in the sense of struggling to survive, or choosing it as opposed to murdering the innocent, is only a small part of the meaning of this passage. What it means is to choose to live a worthwhile life, not just to stay alive or refrain from killing. A meaningless life is equivalent to death. The story is told of a gravestone that says, “Here lies John Henry Jones—born 1941, died 1961, buried 2017.”

To live a meaningful life requires making good choices. The Bible is full of choices. The Hebrew word for choose is

bahar (בהר), and it is used very frequently in the Old Testament. It is rooted in a word that means to draw out or select, in the sense of drawing out the best from what would otherwise be mediocrity. God chose Abraham to be the first Patriarch; he chose Jacob to sire the Israelites, whom he later chose to be the people to prepare the way for the Messiah; he chose David to be the leader who would establish his kingdom in strength; he chose Jerusalem as his holy city; and he chose Solomon to build his Temple, which would be the spiritual center of Judaism for 1000 years.

When God tells us to choose life, he is telling us to make choices that will make our life significant. As our soul was created in the image of God, we are charged to mirror his making of wise and well-considered choices, not simply to exist and live day to day “by the seat of our pants.” To do this, of course, requires conscious effort, the seeking of God’s help, and the consideration of the consequences of our choices—and that requires prayer, study, and a willingness to learn from our bad choices (of which we will make many). To lead a blessed life means to strive to imitate God, and that means to “reject the wrong and choose the right” (Is. 7:16).

Father Rick Losch

Be Wordly Wise

MS-13

The street gang MS-13 has been in the news a great deal lately since the Justice Department declared war on it. The origin of the gang’s name is unknown to most people, and it is rather interesting. Salvadoran immigrants in the Los Angeles area first organized the gang in the 1980s, and it rapidly spread into several American inner cities, as well as into Mexico and Central America. Today it is strongest in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. A particularly fierce breed of fire ant in El Salvador is known as *marabunta*. In Calicha slang (a Central American jargon) the term *mara*, from *marabunta*, is used to refer to any notoriously brutal and vicious

gang. During the Salvadoran civil war in the 1980s one powerful band of guerilla rebels was called the *Salvatruchas*. This is thought to be a combination of *Salvador* and the Calicha *trucha*, alert. When the gang was organized in Los Angeles in the 1980s they took the name *Mara Salvatrucha*. Most MS-13 members are heavily tattooed, and many have that tattooed on their backs.

One of the initiatory rites to join the gang is to be brutally beaten by other gang members for 13 seconds. It is unclear why this number was chosen, but some medical experts have suggested that after 13 seconds of severe beating the probability of permanent or fatal injury rises exponentially. The official name of the gang, then, is *Mara Salvatrucha 13*, but today it is almost universally known simply as MS-13.

Richard R. Losch+

Wilmer Hall Christmas Contribution

Once again St. James' will make a special gift to Wilmer Hall for its Christmas needs this year. Envelopes are available on the table in the vestibule, and contributions should be made payable to St. James' and designated for "Wilmer Hall Christmas." Envelopes may be placed in the alms basins or given to Hiram Patrenos. So that we may forward our gift in time for use this Christmas, you are asked to make your contribution no later than Sunday, November 26th.

Every Member Canvass

St. James' will conduct its Every Member Canvass during the month of November. The Vestry needs this information so that it can plan appropriately for the upcoming year. If you have any questions regarding our parish finances, please do not hesitate to speak with our bookkeeper, Hiram Patrenos, or our Treasurer, Roy Underwood. Pledge cards are available on the table in the vestibule. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James', its mission and its work.

Community Thanksgiving Service

St. James' will be hosting the Community Thanksgiving Service on Tuesday, November 21st, at 5:30 p.m. You are asked to bring canned goods, which will be given to the Sumter County Department of Human Resources for those in need. Please make your plans to attend, and invite your friends and neighbors as we give thanks for the multitude of blessings God has bestowed upon us.

Forward Day by Day

The new *Forward Day by Day* daily devotional booklets for November, December, and January are available on the table in the vestibule and in the tract rack in the parish house. They are available in regular and large print editions.

Bring Your Canned Goods This Month!

St. James' is responsible for supplying the Department of Human Resources Food Bank during the month of November. The food bank has been severely depleted and needs our contributions. A basket is in the vestibule to receive your contributions. Please plan to bring something each week!

Thank You, Deep South Landscaping

We are grateful to Jason Gordy and his workers of Deep South Landscaping for their gift of weeding in the prayer garden, as well as pruning and cleaning up the shrubbery around the church and the rectory. We appreciate their hard work and generosity!

Thank You to Norbert Vaughan!

We are grateful to Norbert Vaughan and his workers for their gift of power washing the church and the parish house, as well as touching up the paint on both buildings. We appreciate their hard work and generosity!

Bar Mitzvah and the Gospel

We are all familiar (I hope) with the Jewish ceremony of the *Bar Mitzvah* (Son of Commandment), in which the congregation recognizes a boy as a man.¹ The ceremony as it is commonly practiced today stems back only to early medieval times, but it is rooted in a ceremony instituted by the Pharisees, probably sometime before the first century BC. When a boy reached the age of about twelve or thirteen, after long training by the leaders of the synagogue, he was allowed to participate in the public reading and interpretation of Torah. This was recognized in a ceremony that eventually became the Bar Mitzvah as we know it today.² The ceremony signaled a very significant change in his status. He was now expected to be responsible for his own moral and ethical integrity. He was not fully considered an adult legally (he could not yet marry or make legal contracts, for example), but he was no longer subject to the full religious guardianship of his father.

In the modern Bar Mitzvah the father makes a very interesting blessing in Hebrew that is believed to go back to the earliest days of this ceremony: *Baruch shepatrani meonesh halazeh*,³ “Blessed is He who has released me from responsibility over this one.” Up until the Bar Mitzvah the father has been fully responsible for his son, and thus the boy has been fully answerable to his father. Spiritually, the father is responsible for closely guiding the child until he is old enough to engage with Torah himself. The Bar Mitzvah in no way releases the boy from his duty to honor and respect his father, and it does not free him from obedience to him. It does mean, however, that from then on he must look to Torah, not to his

¹ Reform Judaism also observes the *Bat Mitzvah* (Daughter of Commandment), a similar ceremony for girls.

² When Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem when he was twelve (Lk. 2:31ff), it was probably for this ceremony. The rabbis there would have examined him to be sure he was ready, and were singularly impressed with his answers (2:47).

³ ברוך שפטרני מענש הלזה

father, as his primary moral and spiritual guide. He is now a Son of Commandment, not simply a child of his father. Although in Reform Judaism this is sometimes called Confirmation, it should not be equated with the Christian Sacrament of Holy Confirmation. The Bar Mitzvah is a transfer of moral responsibility, while in Holy Confirmation the Holy Spirit confers specific spiritual gifts on the child.

There is no question that Saint Paul, a well-educated Pharisee, was thoroughly familiar with this concept of transfer. He saw the same concept in the transfer of spiritual authority from Torah to obedience to the Gospel. He wrote, “Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law (Torah), bound up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. Now that the faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (Gal. 3:23-25). Paul clearly affirmed Jesus’ teaching that the Faith does not abolish Torah, any more than Bar Mitzvah abolishes a boy’s relationship to his father. But as the boy’s reliance on his father’s guardianship is transferred to a reliance on Torah, so is the Christian’s reliance on the guardianship of Torah (the Old Covenant) transferred to a reliance on Christ (the New Covenant).

A grown man loves and revered his father and still looks to him for guidance and inspiration, even though he is no longer under his guardianship. In the same way Christianity still loves and reveres the Old Covenant. We hold its books among our Sacred Scriptures and look to it for guidance and inspiration, but it is no longer our prime spiritual guardian.

Richard R. Losch+

“The Epistle” Is Online

The last four years’ issues of *The Epistle* are online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the “Epistle” tab at the top, then click on the issue you want to see. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file.

Richard R. Losch+

Whatever Happened To the Canaanites?

The Canaanites were an ancient Semitic people who inhabited much of the Middle East in the second millennium BC. In the Bible, the “Land of Canaan” was the Promised Land, the land that God promised to give to the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. This was not actually a nation, but rather a huge confederation of city-states made up of a people with a more-or-less common language and culture. The Land of Canaan mainly covered what is now Lebanon, southern Syria, Israel, Gaza and Jordan. In Biblical times Lebanon was Phoenicia, Syria was Aram, and Jordan was Edom (later Idumea and Nabatea). Little is directly known of the ancient Canaanites before their conquest by the Israelites and Philistines in about the 12th century BC. The reason is that unlike most of their neighbors, who wrote on clay tablets, the majority of their writing was done on perishable papyrus. We do know quite a bit about them from the more durable clay writings of their contemporaries, but of course these are second-hand reports and are often clearly biased.

Recent DNA studies based on bone tissue from Canaanite burial sites have shown that the descendants of the Canaanites did survive and are still among us. While the Israelites and Philistines killed or drove out most of the Canaanites from the regions that now mainly comprise modern Israel and Gaza, the majority of the populations of Lebanon, Jordan and southern Syria have clearly identified Canaanite ancestry. Most of the population of Lebanon is of Canaanite origin, while that of southern Syria and Jordan is considerably more mixed. A strong Arabic infusion occurred during the Muslim invasions in the 7th and 8th centuries AD, but these people for the most part are not of Arabic descent (although there is a powerful influence of Arabic culture in their modern cultures). With the exception of the Philistines, who it is believed were of Hellenic origin, all of these peoples—Canaanites, Israelites and Arabs—were Semitic, and their languages were in the Semitic language family. The term “anti-Semitic” technically

means opposed to any Semite, but in common usage it refers only to the Jews.

The question arises, are the modern people who call themselves Palestinians the descendants of the original Canaanites who owned that land? The answer is clearly, no. A few of them in the Gaza area may be descendants of the Philistines,¹ but the original Canaanites in what we call Palestine were almost all killed or driven out by the original Philistines and Israelites. There has never been a nation called Palestine. What the Romans called *Palestina* was simply a regional term for the southern end of the Roman province of Syria, and had no designated borders or national associations. It was much as we use the term “Middle West” to designate the east central portion of our country, or the term “Levant” to designate the lands on the northeastern end of the Mediterranean. After the Romans expelled the Jews from Palestine in A.D. 132, they brought in people from all over the Roman Empire to repopulate the land. As the Empire decayed in the 4th and 5th centuries, these people began to abandon the land. The cities and towns crumbled into the dust, and the land reverted to desert. Except for Jerusalem² and a few coastal cities it was virtually unpopulated for almost 1200 years until Jews, fleeing persecution mainly from Russia in the late 19th century, migrated there and began reclaiming the land. Under their care the de-

¹ There are still some descendants of the Philistines in the area of the Gaza Strip in modern Palestine, which was the main region in which they settled. They were known as the “Sea Peoples,” and came from somewhere in the islands of the eastern Mediterranean south of the Aegean Sea. They invaded Canaan from the sea at roughly the same time that the Israelites invaded from the southeast in about the 12th century BC. The Romans later called them *Palestinae*, from which we get the names Palestine and Philistine. They were conquered and subdued by King David in the 10th century BC.

² When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70 it lay in rubble until AD 130, when Hadrian built a Roman city called Aelia Capitolina on the site. It would not be called Jerusalem again until 1099, when Godfrey of Bouillon captured it from the Fatimid Caliphate in the First Crusade.

serts bloomed and new towns and cities grew up, and they invited their Muslim neighbors from Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt to come in and share their prosperity. With the exception of the Lebanese, few of these people had any significant Canaanite ancestry. In 1948 the UN created the State of Israel by partitioning the area that was officially owned by the British. The Muslims who had been invited in by the Jews claimed that the Jews had taken their land away from them, and the modern Israeli-Palestinian conflict began.

Richard R. Losch+

Dating Ancient Events

We often read that some event took place in 573 BC or 2231 BC—but how can we know that? The ancient records and inscriptions obviously did not inform us that Christ would be born in another 2231 years, thus enabling us to place the event into our time system. Fortunately, most of the ancient cultures were careful record keepers, especially regarding the reigns of kings. In ancient cultures major events were dated relative to the reign of the king—“Such-and-such happened in the fourth month of the eighteenth year of the reign of King So-and-so.” Isaiah dates his vision with “In the year that King Uzziah died” (Is. 6:1), so we know that he had his vision in 742 BC. But how do we know that Uzziah died in 742?

We have been able to assemble lists of the reigns of kings of almost all the ancient nation, from Europe, the Mediterranean lands, southern Africa and Egypt, through the Middle East and even into the Far East. The writings of many of those peoples frequently referred to the monarchies of their neighbors and enemies, enabling us to refine the relative dates of their kings quite accurately. Now all we needed was something that would enable us to secure those lists to our modern timeline, and nature has provided that. We find that a number of times in ancient records there are references to a celestial event such as a solar or lunar eclipse or the appearance of a comet, supernova or planetary conjunction. Such celestial

events were extremely important to the ancients, because they thought they were omens from the gods that would enable them to predict future events or know the demands of the gods. Modern astronomy is able to pinpoint these ancient events almost to the hour. Thus if we read that there was a solar eclipse in the third month of the fourth year of King So-and-So, we can pinpoint exactly when he reigned. Again, comparing this with many other such events enables us to refine these dates of kings to an amazing level of accuracy, with contradictions being quite rare and relatively insignificant.

Those who know their history may then ask, if that is so, why is there so much confusion about the death date of Herod the Great, on which hinges the birth date of Jesus? The answer is twofold. First, the period of the reign of Herod is one of the few in which there are many contradictions because of political machinations and power-plays between the Herod family, the legitimate Jewish Hasmonean royal family, and the Romans, each making claims to the various thrones. Secondly, the Romanophilic Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, whose writings are full of contradictions, is one of the few historians whose works on that period have survived. He says that there was a lunar eclipse in the year that Herod died. Historians in the 19th century latched onto a partial eclipse in Jerusalem in 4 BC as the one to which Josephus referred. Because of a possible 4-year error in the original 6th century AD calculation of Jesus' birth, that date has stuck. However, there was a total lunar eclipse in Jerusalem in AD 1, and many modern scholars are coming to accept that date. There is still considerable controversy over this, especially since Josephus also has other contradictory statements about Herod's death.

It is interesting to note that most scholars accept the accuracy of dates long preceding Christ's birth, and there is little reason not to do so. Notwithstanding, the date of the birth of Jesus Christ, which is to Christians one of the most important dates in all of history, is still open to argument, spanning a range of six years from 6 BC to AD 1.

Richard R. Losch+

The Gospel and the Good News

A very common word in the New Testament is “gospel.” It comes from the Old English *gōdspel*, which in turn is a combination of *gōd*, good, and *spel*, news or story—literally, the good news.¹ When the long *ō* evolved into a short one and the word became *godspel*, it might seem that the first syllable refers to God, but it does not. It simply means good. The Greek word that we translate “gospel” is *euangelion* (ἑυαγγελιον)². That comes from the prefix *eu-*, good, and *angelion*, message, thus also meaning good news. Yes, the word angel (*angelos* [ἄγγελος], messenger) comes from the same root. The word was Latinized as *evangelium*, from which we get the word evangelist. An evangelist is a messenger of good news.

In ancient Greece it was rare that a battle took place very far from the homeland. There were always messengers at the ready to carry news of the battle back home, particularly at its end. If it were a victory the people would want to know as soon as possible so they could relax and rejoice, and if it were a defeat they would need to know as soon as possible, as they would have to make hasty preparations either to leave or to face the enemy again even closer to home. These messengers were accomplished runners, and would literally run on foot back to the homeland to bear the news—either the bad news (*kakangelion*), or the good (*euangelion*). One of the most famous of these is Pheidippides, the messenger who in 490 B.C. ran 26 miles from Marathon to Athens to bear the news that the Persian invaders had been defeated.³ To this day long-distance endurance footraces are called marathons.

The Prophet Isaiah says, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news ... who say to Zi-

¹ The claim is not true that it comes from the Old German *Gottespiel*, God’s play, although the German *Gott*, God and *gut*, good, both come from the same Sanskrit root that means good.

² In Greek a double gamma (γγ) is pronounced like our *ng*.

³ Herodotus says that Pheidippides also ran 150 miles from Athens to Sparta before the battle to petition for help.

on, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Is. 52:7). This clearly refers to the runners, the messengers, who face difficulty and danger to bring good news to the people. The good news is in a military context, proclaiming that God has defeated his enemies. The prophets (in this case Isaiah) are the messengers designated to carry the news. In the New Testament Saint Paul uses the same imagery regarding Christ’s victory over sin through his death and resurrection. A Roman token of honor to a victorious general was a Triumph, a lavish spectacle that in part involved parading the vanquished enemy as prisoners before the people of Rome. Paul writes, “Having disarmed the powers and authorities [of evil], he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col. 2:15).

The Gospel, then, is the proclamation of God’s victory over all his enemies; and the prophets and evangelists are the messengers who carry that message, that good news, back to God’s people in order that they may respond to it properly.

Richard R. Losch+

The Language of the New Testament

Although some believe that the New Testament was originally written in Aramaic and then translated into Greek, most scholars are convinced that the original documents were written in Greek. Greek was the almost universal language of the western world in Jesus’ time, and had been so since shortly after Alexander the Great’s conquests in the 4th century BC. Even though local regions maintained their local languages, everyone but the most ill-educated also spoke Greek, and in most parts of the Roman Empire it was the predominant language. In the first century BC it was spoken by the Roman upper classes even at home, and was more common than Latin. The Greek that was used was not the Classic Greek of Homer, however, but a simpler form known as Koine¹ (Common) Greek. The difference between Classic and Koine Greek is similar to the difference between the Classic Latin of

¹ Pronounced *coy-NAY*.

Virgil and the Vulgar Latin that was the common language of the marketplace and eventually evolved into “Church” Latin.

The reason for the argument that the New Testament was originally written in Aramaic is that it contains so many Hebraisms. These are expressions that are common to Hebrew and that are not found in the Greek of other regions (Dr. Litzorkin-Eyzenberg calls it Koine Judeo-Greek).¹ This is a weak argument, however, because the Greek of other regions picked up their local idiomatic expressions as well. The writers of the New Testament books were writing to a primarily Gentile readership. By the time they were writing the Church was spreading throughout the Roman Empire, and was not restricted just to Christ-following Jews. They therefore wrote in Koine Greek, the language that would have been most commonly understood throughout the Empire.

It is also argued that with the exception of Nathaniel² and Paul, most of the Apostles had only a basic education, and would not have had a command of the subtleties of Greek. This is true, but we can actually see this in their writings. The Greek of Paul, who was very well educated, and Luke, who was a Greek physician, is much more sophisticated than that of Peter or Mark. Also, it was common in those days that even well-educated men usually did not write their own works, but dictated them to scribes who were expected to “punch up” the language.³ There is little question, then, that the New Testament was indeed originally written in Greek.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ For example, the expression “forty days” did not mean just forty days, it simply meant a very long time; “forty days and forty nights” meant an extremely long time. This idiom is peculiar to Hebrew and Aramaic. It is similar to the way we say, “I’ve told you a thousand times...”

² The expression “I saw you under the fig tree” (Jn. 1:48) was a Hebrew idiom meaning “I recognize that you are a scholar.”

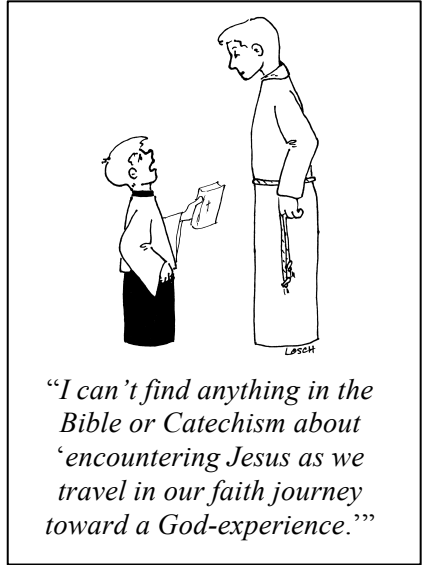
³ This is common in business today. Many businessmen are fortunate enough to have talented secretaries to whom they can dictate what they want to say, and then let their secretaries actually compose the letters.

Altar Flowers

Volunteers are needed to provide Altar Flowers through the season of Pentecost. They can be given in honor or in memory of someone if you wish—just give the name(s) to Hiram Patrenos. A sign-up chart is located in the sacristy. You may use flowers from your yard, or make arrangements with a florist to provide them. For more information, please speak with Carolyn Patrenos.

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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