

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church

Livingston, Alabama



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April 2018

This Month's Cover

In observance of the Feast of the Annunciation on April 9,¹ our cover this month is Murillo's *The Annunciation*. Completed sometime between 1660-65, it is oil on canvas, measuring 4'1"x3'5", and is displayed in the Museo del Prado in Madrid. The angel Gabriel is usually portrayed standing before the Blessed Virgin or hovering over her, but here he is kneeling before her as he would before the Queen of Heaven. Mary is shown as a young girl kneeling at her prayer desk, not in a state of rapture, but in a pose of humility and obedience. On the prayer desk is a vase of lilies, a symbol of purity, in the form of a cross. At her feet is a basket of laundry or sewing, denoting her worldly role as a working-class woman in a first century Jewish household. Without his wings, even the angel would look like a normal worldly young man, barefooted and dressed like a peasant. No peasant would have a blue wrap, as blue was a very expensive dye in those days. Nonetheless Murillo portrays Mary with one, because blue is the traditional color of the Blessed Virgin's robe. Hovering above them is the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, and above him is a host of *putti* ("baby angels," a common device in paintings of that era, usually denoting miraculous events). Gabriel's left hand points to the Holy Spirit, and his right is extended in the form of an entreaty or an offering.

Bartolomé Esteban Perez Murillo was born in Seville in 1617, and spent most of his life there. Little is known about his early life, but his work shows a strong influence of Francisco de Zurbarán, under whom he may have studied. He earned his reputation in 1645-46 with a series of eleven paintings of the lives of Franciscan saints, commissioned by the Franciscan monastery in Seville. Soon thereafter he replaced Zurbarán as Seville's leading painter, and he held that posi-

¹ The Annunciation is normally observed on March 25, nine months before Christmas, but this year it is translated because March 25 is Palm Sunday. No regular feast days are observed during Holy Week or the Octave of Easter, so the earliest it could be celebrated is April 9.

tion the rest of his life. His mature style was quite different from that of his earlier works. It is marked with smooth flowing figures, delicate coloring and sweet, gentle expressions almost bordering on the sentimental. Unlike his other paintings, his few portraits, including a self-portrait, were rather stiff and somber. Most of his works dealt with religious subjects focusing on the Blessed Virgin. His favorite subject was the Immaculate Conception. He was also fond of painting beggar children in their everyday activities. In 1660 he collaborated with Valdés Leal and Francisco Herrera the Younger to found an academy of painting in Seville. He remained its president until his death in 1682. He died apparently from injuries sustained when he fell from a scaffold.

Murillo was the only Spanish painter of his era who was widely known and admired outside of Spain. By the 19th century his reputation had faded, and he was dismissed as being sentimental and saccharine (an irony, considering the extreme sentimentality of much of 19th century art). His reputation rose again in the 20th century, and today he is considered one of the greatest masters of the 17th century.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

Throughout Lent our devotions have (or should have) focused on our mortality. We began the season by being marked with ashes, the symbol of grief and repentance, as we heard the solemn words, “Remember, O man, that dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” Contemplating one’s death may seem morbid, but it is one of the only things in life that is entirely unavoidable. Money, power and influence cannot put it aside, and they will not save us or stay with us when we face

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death. The bright side of Lent, of course, is that it culminates in Easter, the great feast of everlasting life. Life and death are partners, and they cannot be separated. All life depends on death. For us to have food something must die, be it animal or vegetable. The lowest life forms depend on the death of others in order to survive. Even bacteria and algae, although they appear to manufacture their own food, depend on nutrients that come from the deaths of other organisms. Again this sounds morbid, but it's the way God created things and so that's the way it is. We don't know why, but I'm sure that it seemed like a good idea to him when he did it.

The wonderful thing about all this is that God became completely a part of his creation. He does not simply sit aside and watch it, he involves himself in it. When the freedom of will that he gave us led us to turn against him and sin he did not reject us, he saved us. His plan of salvation was to come into the world and take upon himself full humanity along with his own divinity. And just as all life depends on death, and death is an integral part of being alive, he made eternal life available to us through his own death on the cross. Thus our immortality depends on the death and Resurrection of Christ.

We do not rejoice at Easter because of parties and the promise of spring, we rejoice because our mortality is overcome by the love of God. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55ff).

Father Rick Losch

DHR Food Bank

St. James' is responsible for supplying the Department of Human Resources Food Bank during the month of April. 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!

Hiram Patrenos

2017 Parochial Statistics

The 2017 parochial statistics for St. James' and St. Alban's Churches, from the diocesan annual report, are as follows:

<i>St. James' Episcopal Church, Livingston</i>	2016	2017
Total Active Baptized Members	32	24
Total Communicants in Good Standing	29	23
Average Sunday Attendance	23	20
Easter Sunday Attendance	33	35
Total Sunday Holy Communions	49	48
Total Weekday Holy Communions	2	4
Private Holy Communions	0	0
Daily Offices held on Sunday	2	0
Daily Offices & other services held on Weekdays	6	4
Burials conducted	1	1
Marriages conducted	0	0
Baptisms under 16 years of age	1	0
Confirmations 16 years & older	1	1
Confirmations under 16 years of age	2	0

<i>St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Gainesville</i>	2016	2017
Total Active Baptized Members	4	4
Total Communicants in Good Standing	4	4
Regular attendants not recorded in Parish Register	5	7
Average Sunday Attendance	6	12
Easter Sunday Attendance	N/A	49
Total Sunday Holy Communions	12	10
Total Weekday Holy Communions	0	0
Private Holy Communions	N/A	N/A
Daily Offices held on Sunday	1	0
Daily Offices held on Weekdays	0	0
Burials conducted	0	0

Moving or Changing Address?

If you plan to move or change your address, or if you no longer wish to receive *The Epistle*, please notify us at St. James' Church, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470 or at rlosch33@gmail.com. It costs us an extra postal fee when a copy "bounces," and if it does we will simply remove the name from our mailing list. Thank you.

Richard R. Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

Amen

Almost every language in the world contains the word *amen*, and each uses it in just about the same way. What most people do not realize, however, is that even though it is an almost universal word, it is originally a Hebrew word that has carried over in its original form into the other languages. In spite of the common misunderstanding it is not simply the equivalent of “So be it” or “I agree.” When it appears in the Greek New Testament as *amen* (ᾠμήν) it is often translated as “truly” or “verily,” as in “Verily, verily, I say unto you...” (John 6:47, KJV). The Bible also uses it in the more familiar way, as the final word at the end of a prayer or blessing: “Blessed be the Lord for evermore. Amen” (Ps. 89:52).

The Hebrew word *amen* (אמן) derives from *emunah* (אמונה), which means faith. In Hebrew it is an adjective, not an interjection such as “yes” or “agreed.” It serves as a modifier to a whole statement. In the Hebrew tradition, saying “*amen*” is a conscious commitment in faith to an understanding of, and agreement with, what has been said. In many Protestant churches, especially the more Pentecostal, it is common to hear shouts of “Amen!” throughout a sermon. In English we often use it in the same sense when we say such things as “Amen to that!”, but all too often we just say it mechanically at the end of a prayer without ever thinking of what its real meaning is.

Richard R. Losch+

Fifth Sunday Service

The Fifth Sunday Community Service this month will be hosted by St. James’ on Sunday, April 29th at 11:00 a.m. Please make your plans to attend and support this Livingston tradition.

Hiram Patrenos

Even duct tape can't fix stupid, but it can muffle the sound.

The Saints of God

We talk a lot about the saints, and yet many people (probably the majority of Christians) are not clear just who or what a saint is. The simplest definition is that a saint is any person who is in heaven, although Saint Paul referred to all the baptized who seek to do the will of God as saints. In the early days of the Church there were many who were recognized as having led exemplary Christian lives, and they were held up as role models for other Christians to emulate. A person came to be known as Saint So-and-so simply by acclamation of the people. This applied not only to outstandingly holy people, but also to all martyrs for the Faith. In time, however, a formal process developed for the conferring of the title of Saint. This is not a claim that the Church has the right to tell God who gets into heaven and who does not. Rather, it is simply a means of determining who we want to recognize as ideal examples of Christian life. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches follow this procedure. The Anglican Church has no such procedure, but recognizes as saints all who are so proclaimed by the Roman or Orthodox Churches. Most Protestant churches officially reject the concept of saints, although they often use the title, such as referring to Saint Peter or Saint Patrick.

The process is called canonization. While there have been times when it is done very quickly, as in the case of Saint Teresa of Calcutta ("Mother Teresa"), it usually takes several years and sometimes drags on for centuries. The first step, usually initiated by popular acclamation, is for the person to be declared Venerable. In the Roman Church the case is then put into the hands of Vatican officials, who carefully examine the person's life, including everything they can find about his personal and spiritual life, his writings and teachings, and so on. In time, usually if he has a cult of followers who continue to venerate him, he may be beatified.¹ This is a formal ceremony investing him with the title "Blessed." After this, two things are required before he can be canonized and called a saint. One is that there must be found at least two miracles that can be directly attributed to him and confirmed. Second, a person or committee commonly called a "Devil's Advocate" is appointed with the purpose of finding anything in the person's life that would

¹ Despite common usage, a cult is not a group of fanatics, but simply a group of followers who honor a person or idea.

be considered inconsistent with sainthood. Many of the greatest saints led profligate or immoral lives in their early days, but after their conversion they led saintly lives. What happened before their conversion is irrelevant, but in order to be considered saints they must have led exemplary lives thereafter.

A hagiography is a collection of short biographies of saints. One of the reasons that the Protestant reformers rejected the concept of saints is that the majority of hagiographies in the 15th and 16th centuries carried stories that were not only obviously imaginative, but often outrageously fanciful to the point of being ridiculous even to the superstitious and gullible medieval mind. This is particular unfortunate because buried in these hagiographies are many stories of real events that have been passed down for many generations. It is often difficult to separate the truth from the fiction, yet we are loath to disregard stories of great heroism and sanctity just because they have been tainted by centuries of oral tradition and imaginative embellishments. As archaeologists find more and more early documents and inscriptions, however, we are increasingly able to discern the truth and reject the fiction.

There is not a single day of the year that does not have several saints associated with it, although the majority of those who traditionally bear the title of Saint (there are thousands) are not formally commemorated in the official Church calendars. Generally, a saint's date is determined by the date of his birth, his death, or some event for which he is most famous. In Anglican tradition, many people commemorated in the calendar are not saints, but have made significant contributions to theology, the Church, or the betterment of peoples' lives. For example, Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (September 25, his death date) would very likely never qualify as a saint, but he was one of the most brilliant scholars of the late 16th and early 17th centuries, and was the overseer of the translation of the King James Version of the Bible.

Even though some Christians are specifically recognized as saints, that does not mean that the rest of us are not. Anyone who sincerely strives to do God's will is a saint, whether or not anyone else recognized him as such. As the old children's hymn goes, "You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea, or in church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea, for the saints of God are folks just like me, and I mean to be one, too."

Richard R. Losch+

Bread and Wine

Whether you take the story of Adam and Eve literally or allegorically, it nonetheless carries a powerful message about our mortality and our relationship with God. According to the story, after they had eaten the forbidden fruit¹ Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden and condemned to live a mortal life of toil and suffering. In Paradise they had everlasting life and an abundance of delightful fruits that satisfied all their physical needs. When they were cast out they were condemned to struggle for their food, which they would have to raise for themselves: “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:17b^{ff}, NRSV).

Even for those who believe in a divinely guided evolution this story rings true. At some point in the evolutionary process God imbued an innocent creature with an immortal soul, and thus humanity was created. With that soul were given the priceless gifts of intellect and free will, and thus also the capability of sin. As soon as he was capable of sin man chose from time to time to commit it, and so have we all ever since.

It is significant that in the passage above, God spoke specifically of bread. The general word for food in Hebrew is *oklah* (אכלה) which the King James Version often translates as meat (in Jacobean English, meat meant any food, not just flesh). The word in this passage, however, is *lechem* (לחם), which means bread made with grain. Bread, unlike most fruits and vegetables, is a food that does not come directly from the ground but requires an input of human labor. Wine, likewise, although its source is natural fruit, requires careful preparation before it becomes a desirable

¹ The Bible does not identify what kind of fruit it was. While tradition calls the fruit an apple, most scholars believe for many reasons that what the original writers had in mind was a pomegranate.

drink. This is a major difference between humans and animals. Wild animals eat food as it comes directly from nature, requiring no other preparation than to gather or kill it. The preponderance of human food, on the other hand, is the result of careful alteration and preparation that is sometimes very intensive (consider the knowledge, labor and time that are devoted to the making of many cheeses and spirits). The ability to do that is the result of intellect, which is a gift of God, and of experience.

When we consider all this, it becomes evident that bread and wine are results of the fall—Adam and Eve did not have them until after they had been expelled from Paradise. The price was high, but I believe that it was all part of God’s plan and that it is well worth the price. Were it not for free will there could have been no fall; and were it not for the fall we would still be prancing around Eden naked and accomplishing nothing. I am convinced that when God created us he intended more for us than that.

It is no coincidence that while bread and wine are tokens of the fall of man, they are also the means by which Christ unites us to him in the Holy Eucharist and thus ultimately restores us to Paradise—but this Paradise is not one of no accomplishment, but rather one of total fulfillment. After the story of the fall, the next biblical focus on bread is in the story of the Exodus. On the night of the Exodus the Israelites sacrificed a lamb and in haste made unleavened bread as a meal to prepare themselves for the flight from Egypt. This is a story of liberation from slavery to Pharaoh. It foretokens our liberation from our slavery to sin through the sacrifice of Christ, the Paschal Lam, and our spiritual refreshment through his Body and Blood in the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist. Unleavened bread, which is bread in its simplest form, is a token of deliverance. Its simplicity eschews the worldly delights of luxury and savor, and emphasizes its role as supplying our most basic need—the need to be reunited with God.

After the creational gifts of life, intellect and free will, the greatest gift of God is deliverance from the spiritual weakness that separates us from him.

The wine of the Eucharist should also be a simple one, not a fine aged vintage that would grace the tables of the rich. It is always mixed with a little water, the most basic of the the physical needs of all living things. This denotes the commingling of the divine and the human in Christ. As the priest mixes the wine and water in preparation for the Eucharist, he says words to the effect of, "By this commingling of wine and water may we share in Christ's divinity, even as he humbled himself to share in our humanity."

As we said above, whether we take the story of Adam and Eve literally or allegorically, the message is the same. We rebelled against God and sinned, and the result was expulsion from a state of innocence, and ultimately physical death. The just God had to exact punishment for sin, but the loving God, because we could not deliver ourselves from sin, gave us the means to be delivered. He took our humanity upon himself, died on the cross and rose from the dead to overcome death. And to enable us to join with him eternally, he used the very tokens of that fall, bread and wine, as the sacramental means through which we can again become one with him in everlasting life.

Richard R. Losch+

The Mystic Number 8

From the dawn of history numbers have been an important part of religious mysticism. Most people are aware that 3, 7 and 11 have always been deemed significant numbers, but few know that for thousands of years the number 8 has played a major role in Jewish and Christian mysticism. The number 8 denotes eternity (in math a sideways 8 [∞] denotes infinity). According to the Bible, God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. The eighth day, then, denotes the beginning of the next cycle in the eternal existence of creation.

The first day denotes the beginning of creation, but the eighth day denotes its carrying on forever. The first seven days are emblematic of the Natural Law that all nature obeys, and the eighth day is emblematic of the giving of God's Law (the Torah) that the Jews are commanded to obey. This is why Jewish Law requires the circumcision of a male child on the eighth day after birth. Circumcision is the token of being part of the Covenant with God, and that Covenant, being eternal, is bound on the day that denotes eternity, the eighth day. Ancient Christian tradition also expects babies to be baptized on the eighth day unless danger of infant death necessitates it earlier. Although Christians are not bound by Torah, they are bound by the Faith as revealed to the Church. Throughout the Middle Ages, and even today, most baptisteries and baptismal fonts were octagonal, again symbolizing the eighth day.¹ Jewish mysticism also notes that there were eight people on the Ark, which is a symbol of deliverance and a new beginning. It is also significant that Christ rose from the grave on Sunday, which is not only the first day, it is also the eighth. His Resurrection was not on the first day, the beginning of Old Creation, but on the eighth, the beginning of the New Creation.

The Book of Revelation identifies the Mark of the Beast (Satan) as 666. In Greek, the name of Jesus is *Iesous* (Ἰησοῦς). In ancient Greece numbers were represented by letters just as in the Roman numeral system. Each letter of the alphabet has a numeric value. If you add the numeric value of Ἰησοῦς it comes to 888.² As Dr. Taylor Marshall points out, if the Beast, the first creation, is 666, then this world as we know it would be 777, and Christ, the New Creation, is 888.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Pulpits were also often octagonal. Many fonts and pulpits today are hexagonal. There seems to be no explanation for that other than that perhaps the designers intended to emulate the ancient ones and did not recognize the significance of their eight sides. The font and pulpit in St. James' are hexagonal.

² I=10, η=8, σ=200, ο=70, υ=400, ς(ς)=200. Their sum is 888.

The Sins of the Parents

In the story of the giving of the Ten Commandments, God says, “I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me” (Ex. 20:5).¹ Taken at face value, this seems like the words of a vengeful and unjust God. Why should the children be held responsible for the sins of their parents?² Upon closer consideration, however, this statement runs much deeper. God does not punish us for what someone else has done, he holds us responsible only for our own sins. We are accountable for all our sins, regardless of what led us to commit them. God in his mercy may consider the circumstances in determining what punishment to inflict, but sin is nonetheless sin, and will incur punishment. Notwithstanding, God does not punish us for the sins of others.

If we examine this passage more carefully, we come to realize that it places an onerous burden of responsibility on us. Christ entered human history physically for only thirty-three years, and only three of those were devoted to his public ministry. After the Ascension he was no longer with us physically, but on the first Christian Pentecost he sent the Holy Spirit to deposit the Faith with the Church. In other words, he placed into the hands of his followers, the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, the responsibility for continuing his teaching and his ministry of salvation. That was two thousand years ago. The reason that we even know about Jesus today is that for two thousand years people have told the story and continued in the sacramental ministrations that he gave us. If we fail to continue to tell the story, not only with words but

¹ See “Can God Hate?” in the March 2018 *Epistle*. The Hebrew word that is translated hate here is *saneh* (שנא), which means to hate in the way we usually use the word, meaning to loathe or detest with hostility.

² This is much closer to the theology of ancient Greece than to that of Judaism or Christianity. Much of the greatest of ancient Greek literature and mythology is based on the gods’ punishment of people for the sins or crimes of their ancestors.

more importantly in the way we live, we will be denying future generations the opportunity for salvation—and if so, we will have to answer for that. I do not want to stand before God being accountable for the loss of souls!

The Exodus passage above condemns in particular those who hate God. There are people who call themselves atheists, who actively try to destroy religion and remove all reference to it from the public square.¹ They are not only condemning themselves, but they are also leading others to damnation, a sin for which they will ultimately have to answer. Hate, although it comes in a wide spectrum of intensities, is actually nothing more than the absence of love. This can range from intense detestation to simple apathy. Failure to tell the story of Christ's salvation even because of simple apathy or ignorance will result in others not hearing it, and thus in the potential loss of their souls. The final result is no different from that of those who actively oppose God, and those guilty of it will have to answer for their failure before the throne of God.

Those who hate God, whether their hatred is antipathy or simple apathy, will have to answer for it. It is also likely that their children (and others over whom they have influence), will also learn from them to hate God to the same degree. For that the children will also be punished. They will not be punished for their parents' sin, but for their own. Their own sin, however, is most likely the result of what their parents taught them, either by commission or omission. It is in that sense that God will punish the children "for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

Whether or not we have children of our own, we are all parents. We influence others, teach others, and set examples

¹ I submit that such people are not really atheists. Inwardly, maybe even subconsciously, they believe in God and they are terrified. We always hate most in others what we fear most in ourselves, and if they can remove any reminder of God they can stick their heads in the sand and not have to confront their fears. A true atheist, at least in a culture that has freedom of religion, would never get upset about other people's religion, because it is not a threat to him.

to others. In that sense, young or old, we are parents of God's children, responsible for teaching morals, values and the Faith. Our society has no shortage of young thugs, hoodlums and criminals. Barring the mentally ill, in almost every case where one does something so heinous that it catches the eye of the national news, we find that he comes from a broken or dysfunctional home where he was never taught solid values, compassion, respect for others, or devotion to God. The parents failed to "tell the story," and the children suffer because of it. It is in this sense that "the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2).

Are we telling the story?

Richard R. Losch+

The Dates of Easter

This year Easter falls on April 1, which is relatively early. In the Western calendar Easter is the first Sunday after the Paschal Full Moon, which is the first full moon on or after the Vernal Equinox (the time in the spring that day and night are of equal length). The Church recognizes March 21 as the Equinox, even though astronomically it is closer to the March 20. The Council of Nicaea determined that date in AD 325 using the Julian calendar, and ecclesiastically it has never been updated to the Gregorian calendar that we use today. Thus the earliest Easter can ever fall is March 22. The latest it can be is April 25, giving it a 35-day possible span. It will not fall on April 25 again until 2038, or on March 22 until 2285. Next year it will be relatively late, falling on April 21.

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The Epistle is Online

The last five years of *The Epistle* are now online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the "Epistle" tab at the top. 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

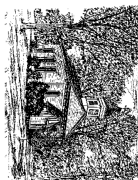
A Touch of Trivia

Warren G. Harding is acknowledged by both parties to have been the most incompetent President in American history. Although he seems to have been unaware of it, his administration was rotten with corruption. He was described as “good-looking, charming and out of his depth,” and “oddly likeable in his ineptitude.” He said of himself, “I am a man of limited talents from a small town; I don’t seem to grasp that I am President.” He was an avid poker player. He once gambled away on a single hand a complete set of White House china that went back to the days of Benjamin Harrison.

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