



## This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is *Saint Matthew*, the first of eight panels of the Evangelists by Gabriel Mälesskircher, completed in about 1478. They are tempera on wood, and are currently in the *Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza* in Madrid. They were originally panels from thirteen altarpieces painted for the Tegernsee Abbey in Bavaria. This panel shows Saint Matthew at his writing desk sharpening a quill pen, with his inspirational angel leaning on the other side of the desk. The setting is a classic 15<sup>th</sup> century writing studio in which manuscripts were created or copied. At his right is his open tool-desk. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century most people lived and worked in the same rooms, so we see at the back of the room a washing commode with a long towel hanging beside it, and a wooden wardrobe. A broom hangs on the wall, and eight glass or silver ewers are hanging from the shelf—an interesting mixture of the mundane and moderate luxury. Matthew's clothing is the simple gown of a 15<sup>th</sup> century middle-class German.



Detail: *Sharpening a Pen*

Gabriel Mälesskircher (c.1425-c.1495) was a Bavarian painter. Not much is known about his early life. There is some evidence that he may have spent at least part of his apprenticeship in the Netherlands, but most of his life was in Bavaria, mainly around Munich. He was definitely in Munich after 1461, as he was the head of the Guild of Saint Luke, a painters' guild. He became a member of the Munich city council in 1469, and in 1485 he became the *Zweiterburgomeister* (deputy mayor) of Munich. Much of his work was done for the Tegernsee Abbey, as he had married the sister of its abbot. He maintained a very successful workshop in Munich, where one of his

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top students was Michael Wolgemut, who would go on to become Albrecht Dürer's teacher. In 1470 he received a major commission from Sigmund, Duke of Bavaria to paint a number of works for Fürstenberg Abbey. He also worked in at least two other abbeys, as well as in the palaces of some of the nobility. His health began to fail in the last few years of his life, and his son Kaspar undertook the operation of his studio under his supervision. Mälesskircher died of the plague in about 1495.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***A Word from the Editor***

We have all heard that the optimist says the glass is half full, the pessimist says the glass is half empty, and the engineer says the glass is the wrong size. There are very few situations that cannot be seen from either a positive or a negative point of view. When you reach the top you can take pleasure in your achievement, or be sad that now you have nowhere to go but down; when you are at the bottom, you can grumble and feel sorry for yourself, or rejoice in the opportunity to work to make things better. I am advocating neither a “tiptoe through the tulips” denial of reality, nor a “pie-in-the-sky bye and bye” false hopefulness. Rather, I am advocating what Christianity teaches us, which is that we have the choice as to whether to see hope in the midst of worldly troubles, or to see misery even when we are surrounded by blessings. In this world, there is nothing so evil that some good cannot be derived from it, nor is there anything so good that it cannot be twisted to support evil by those who choose to do so. Our responsibility, therefore, is not to be blind optimists and deny that anything is bad, nor to be blind pessimists and ignore the good. Our responsibility is to be the engineer—to see what can be made even better, and then strive to do so. This is easy to say, but not always very easy to do. It requires an honest and clear-minded view of what is happening, and it often requires actions that are in opposition to what is popular or even acceptable in today's society. This in turn requires acceptance of the guidance, courage and wisdom

available to us through prayer and the help of the Holy Spirit. Look to this world, and you will see a sea of troubles. Look to heaven, and you will see the positive side. It is all a matter of our own choice of how to see and deal with life.

*Father Rick Losch+*

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## ***Be Wordly Wise***

### ***Fellowship***

Fellowship is a word whose misuse in both religious and secular contexts sends chills up the spine of any grammarian. The word fellowship is a noun, and only a noun. It can never be used correctly as a verb. You can enjoy fellowship with your friends, but you cannot fellowship with them. What Episcopalians call a parish house, many denominations call a fellowship hall, and that is fine. A meeting takes place in a meeting hall, and fellowship takes place in a fellowship hall—but “fellowshipping” does not. That would be the gerund of the verb “to fellowship,” and except in its misuse there is no such verb. You can gather together to have fellowship, but you cannot fellowship together. The word is a combination of fellow, meaning companion, and the suffix -ship, denoting a collection of individuals in a group (as in membership<sup>1</sup>). It goes back at least to the 13<sup>th</sup> century Middle English *feolahschipe*, meaning companionship. By the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century it had received the secondary meaning of a position of academic privilege in a university (such as a Fulbright Fellowship). The abuse of the word is not new. In his 1848 *Dictionary of Americanisms* (a book deriding American corruption of the English language), John Russell Bartlett wrote, “*To fellowship with* is to hold communion with; to unite with in doctrine and discipline. ‘This barbarism now appears with disgusting frequency in the reports of ecclesiastical conventions, and in the religious newspapers generally.’”

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<sup>1</sup> Just as you don’t fellowship with other fellows, you don’t membership with other members of an organization.

## **Bonhoeffer's "Theory of Stupidity"**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer ranks among the great spiritual thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and is one of its outstanding Christian martyrs. He was a German Lutheran, but his writings are important to all denominations, and even to non-Christians. They are still major subjects of study and discussion today. He was a renowned professor of theology in Germany, but when Hitler came to power in 1933, he resigned his post at the University of Berlin and emigrated to the United States. In 1935, already widely acclaimed in America, he resigned his post here, cancelled a nationwide lecture tour, and returned to Germany. He had seen the German churches beginning to compromise under Nazi pressure, so he returned to found the Confessing Church, a Christian movement in resistance to Nazism.<sup>1</sup> He founded a seminary that soon attracted a very large student body, but after two years the Nazis closed it down, and he was forbidden to speak in public or to publish. He was gifted not only as a thinker, but also as a writer. Huge amounts of his writings were smuggled out of Germany, including not only theology, but also poetry, letters, and a theologically oriented novel, *Sontag*. He was involved in several early plots to assassinate Hitler, not in their planning or execution, but rather in the gathering and communicating of useful data. In April 1943 the Gestapo arrested him and sentenced him to prison without trial. Even there he continued writing, having his works smuggled out by friends and sympathizers. Even though he was in prison, the Nazis accused him of being involved in "Operation Valkyrie," the legendary 1944 plot to blow up Hitler in the Wolf's Lair. He was moved to the dreaded basement prison in the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin, and in April 1945 he was moved to Flossenbürg concentration camp. Just three weeks before

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<sup>1</sup> By "Confessing" he did not mean the confession of sins to other Christians, although he did believe in that. What he meant was a Church that would confess (bear witness to) the true Faith. He had seen the German churches fall into "stupidity" as he defined it, rationalizing and sometimes openly abetting Hitler's National Socialist agenda.

Germany's surrender, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hanged.

Bonhoeffer argued that the most dangerous enemy of good is not evil, but stupidity. He says that stupidity is not simply lack of intelligence. Intellectual deficiency is easily recognizable, and can be dealt with. Stupidity is the inability or unwillingness to accept the truth even when it is obvious. It is particularly dangerous because it can be highly contagious. Even very intelligent people can sometimes be quite stupid. People can usually recognize the presence of evil, because it makes us consciously uncomfortable. Recognizing its presence, we can then erect barriers against it and prepare to resist it. On the other hand, we rarely recognize stupidity until it is too late, and we are thus often defenseless against it.

Bonhoeffer argues that stupidity is a group phenomenon, and that is what makes it so dangerous. An individual can act stupidly, but his stupid actions rarely have any effect on society or on a large group, but only on himself and those immediately around him. When a group acts stupidly, on the other hand, it can not only effect major change (rarely for the better), but it also affects the individuals in the group, usually exacerbating their own stupidity. Herd behavior is the primary cause of stupidity. Psychological studies have shown how the behavior of the individual is easily swayed by the behavior of the crowd. The crowd, however, can be stirred to stupidity by the stupid or malicious actions of a few of its members. This is why a large restless crowd can so easily be turned into a riot. This is also what we mean when we say that stupidity is contagious.<sup>1</sup>

Herd behavior, even though it can be overcome by conscious effort, is probably “hard-wired” into human nature. It can be

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<sup>1</sup> I remember seeing an interview several years ago with a woman who had been in the Resistance in the days of Hitler's rise to power. She was at the *Parteitag* (Party rally) in Nürnberg in 1933. when there were hundreds of thousands of people cheering Hitler, shouting, “*Sieg Heil!*” She said that she was revolted by this display of herd stupidity, but then she had the most terrifying experience of her life. As Hitler paraded by, she realized that her own arm was extended in the Nazi salute, and she heard herself shouting, “*Sieg Heil!*” That is the frightening power of mob psychology.

observed throughout recorded history, and archaeological evidence indicates that it was in our ancestors thousands and perhaps even millions of years ago. It may be a survival technique. When you are in danger and information is limited, it is often safest to do what you see others doing. Children learn by observing and emulating what they see others do. Sometimes common sense tells us to take a different path than the one that others are taking. Unfortunately, however, common sense is a rare commodity in large groups. We all remember our mothers saying when we wanted to follow the crowd, "Just because everyone else is jumping off a cliff, does that mean that you should, too?" Following the crowd is often not the best course for a lemming. Unfortunately, following the crowd seems to be natural to humans. In twelve psychological experiments on the subject, over 75% of the participants conformed to the majority at least once, even when their responses were obviously wrong. It is not clear whether this was simple herd conformity, or the subjects thought that if so many others thought that way, there must be something to it. Either way, they accepted something that they would have rejected if they were on their own.

Bonhoeffer wrote, "The power of the one needs the stupidity of the many." The herd mentality is mother's milk to those who would exploit the crowd to gain power or money. Throughout the ages it has been used by politicians and mass-marketers, and modern technology has greatly enhanced their ability to do so. There is a reason that a 30-second ad on the Super Bowl broadcast costs \$5 million, yet companies are happy to pay it.

Bonhoeffer does not offer a solution to mass stupidity in his thesis on the subject, but his other writings clearly indicate that he believes there is one. It is the Church, but not the organized earthly Church. That itself is often subject to herd mentality, from the local parish right up the ladder of its organization to the very top. Rather it is the Church Universal, the Mystical Body of Christ, the body of all the baptized faithful, whose head is Jesus Christ. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Church is capable of reversing the destructive effects of herd

mentality, turning it instead to an enhancement of rational behavior. This is true because just as a small group of people can lead a whole crowd to stupid action, so can a small group of rational people bring a crowd to righteousness. This is what Bonhoeffer hoped to accomplish when he founded the Confessing Church in Germany in 1935. He drew a distinction between Faith and Religion. He defined Faith as accepting God's grace from above on God's terms, even when it is inconvenient, uncomfortable or even dangerous for us. He defined Religion as reaching up to God on our terms and trying to form him into something we would like him to be. He said that we need a Church with much more Faith and much less Religion.

German Christianity, both Protestants and Catholics alike, had fallen under much of Hitler's spell. Bonhoeffer founded the Confessing Church in the belief that once the Church could learn to divest itself of religion and clothe itself in faith, stupidity could be abolished and sanity restored to mankind. Not only his teachings, but also his martyrdom may be significant steps toward that worthy goal.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***Monkeying With the Scriptures***

In the last issue we wrote about Gematria, the ancient Hebrew mystic system of numerology. In Revelation 13:18, John identifies "the number of the Beast" (Satan or the Anti-Christ) as 666, which is the Gematrian number for Nero. In the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, as the Bible began to appear in Latin instead of Hebrew and Greek, several manuscripts identified the number of the Beast as 616 instead of 666. In both Hebrew and Greek, Nero's name is *Neron Kesar*, and the number for that is 666. In Latin it is *Nero Caesar*, whose number is 616. The scribes obviously altered the text for their Latin readers in order to make the number fit the preconceived idea that it referred to Nero (which it probably did). This is why it is so important for scholars and translators to use the earliest texts possible.

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## ***Restoring the Chalice to the People***

As the Covid-19 pandemic surged in March of 2020, St. James', at the behest of Bishop Sloan, joined the other Episcopal churches in Alabama (and across the country) in temporarily suspending public worship. That September we resumed services, observing all the recommended precautions such as masking, social distancing, use of hand-sanitizers, etc. One of those precautions was administering Holy Communion in only one kind, the consecrated Bread. Since the Body and Blood of Christ are equally present in both the Bread and the Wine, receiving either alone constitutes a full and valid Communion, in which one receives both the Body and Blood of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Although each communicant receives a separate particle of the Host, there is powerful symbolism of our unity in Christ when all receive his Blood from a common Chalice. This is one of the many reasons that in the Episcopal Church we do not use individual "communion cups" as many Protestant churches do.

We have written in the past about the sanitary concerns of the common chalice, and will not take the space here to do so again. Suffice it to say that because of the bactericidal properties of gold and silver, the likelihood of contracting disease from a properly administered chalice has been scientifically tested. It is about the same as the likelihood of doing so from an allegedly clean drinking glass in a restaurant.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, we believe that it is wiser to lean toward the side of caution, and during the pandemic we agreed that it is wise to suspend

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<sup>1</sup> His Body and Blood were separated on the Cross, but were eternally and inseparably reunited in his Resurrection. Reception in only one kind was the practice of the Church for centuries until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the Protestant Reformation demanded that the chalice be made available to the people. The Roman Catholic Church started doing so on an experimental basis after Vatican Council II in 1965, and it is now a common practice.

<sup>2</sup> This is true only of a properly wiped silver or gold vessel containing an alcoholic liquid (wine). It is not true of ceramic, glass, wood or base metal chalices, and it is certainly not true of the tin cup on the public pump, which transmitted countless diseases in former times.

the administration of the Chalice except for the Celebrant.

The pandemic is now abating, and we have returned many of our practices to more-or-less normal. Barring a major resurgence of the pandemic in the next few weeks, we plan to resume the administration of the Chalice to the people on Sunday, September 11, the first Sunday after Labor Day. If you wish to continue receiving in only one kind, you are welcome to do so. Simply return to your pew after you have received the Host. If you receive in only one kind, you will still have received a full and valid Communion of both the Body and Blood of Christ.

The pandemic is not yet officially over, but even if it were, it has made us much more aware of hygienic concerns. Because of this, there will be one minor change for those who wish to receive by intinction. Before the pandemic, the priest placed the Host on your hand, and the chalice-bearer took it from your hand, intincted it, and administer it to you.<sup>1</sup> This is in fact extremely unhygienic. When the Host contacts your hand, which has touched who-knows-what, it can then transmit germs to the Chalice, where they can infect the next intincted Hosts. Since the intincted Host does not contact the bactericidal silver, there is a sanitary concern. For that reason, we will administer intinction in a slightly different way. If you wish to receive by intinction, indicate so by going directly to the Chalice-bearer and placing your hand over your heart as a sign to him. He will intinct a Host, and administer it to you as in the past.

It is true that when we are dealing with the Body and Blood of Christ, the last thing we should be concerned about is germs. Rather, we should have faith in the protection of God. The Bible also tells us, however, that while we are not of the world, yet we are in the world, along with its countless dangers, of which we should be cautious. As Jesus reminded Satan, “It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

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<sup>1</sup> In some parishes the communicant is permitted to intinct by dipping the Host into the Chalice himself. This is not only liturgically questionable, it can also be extremely unsanitary. This is not the practice in St. James’.

## ***Philistines and Palestinians***

In the late 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, a large number of groups of Hellenic pirates known as the “Sea Peoples” were active in the regions around the Aegean Sea. Their true origin is unknown. They raided the eastern Mediterranean from the Levant all the way to Egypt. At about this same time that the Israelites were invading Canaan from the east, one of these groups was invading the coastal region that is known today as the Gaza Strip. In Hebrew they were called the *Pelishtim* (פלשתים), which the Bible translates as Philistines. These people ruled only the coastal region, and never the whole area that is commonly called Palestine. They ruled there from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century to the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, when they were defeated and completely subdued by King David. There are no known descendants of them today. When the Romans conquered Judah (thereafter known as Judea), they made it a sub-province of the enormous Province of Syria.<sup>1</sup> They designated that portion of the province as *Syria Palestina*, deriving the name from *Pelishtim*. This was simply a regional designation with no formally defined borders, much as we refer to the “Middle West.” It is from that term that we get the names Palestine and thus Palestinians. For centuries, when the term Palestinian was used at all, it referred to any inhabitants of the region, Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. From 1516 to 1918 the land was under the control of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, and after its collapse it was under British rule. In 1948 the United Nations chartered the State of Israel, with Britain ceding the control to Israel, and the rest of the land to its residents. In 1964 Yasser Arafat founded the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to challenge the right of the State of Israel to exist. He designated all Muslim inhabitants of the region as Palestinians, and declared their right of nationhood. The resolution of the conflict remains to be seen.

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<sup>1</sup> This should not be confused with the modern nation of Syria, which is only a small part of the Roman Province of Syria.

## *Passing the Peace*

The Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962-65) introduced a number of liturgical reforms, including the *Novus Ordo* (“New Order”). This was a new form for the Mass that was to be said in the vernacular language rather than in the traditional Latin. This replaced the form that had been used since the Council of Trent, which was convened in 1545 in response to the Protestant Reformation.<sup>1</sup> Included in the *Novus Ordo* was a point when the priest addresses the people with, “The Peace of the Lord be always with you,” to which the people respond, “And also with you.”<sup>2</sup> The people were supposed to greet the person next to them in the pew, as a reminder that we are not alone, but are all united in God’s love and peace. This came to be known as “passing the Peace.” The greeting normally involved words to the effect of, “Peace be with you” and a handshake, but sometimes people would hug or exchange the “kiss of peace.” This is a kiss on the cheek, which is an ancient Mediterranean tradition. Since few Americans are comfortable with that kind of intimacy, most are content with a simple handshake or a friendly nod.

This practice goes back to the earliest days of Christianity, when it was used in almost all gatherings of Christians. For a number of reasons, however, it was downplayed in most formal liturgies many centuries ago. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a few Protestant churches, particularly the Pentecostals, restored it as a part of their formal worship. It was originally practiced in a dignified and worshipful way. In recent years almost every Protestant church has adopted it. In 1979 the Episcopal Church revised their Book of Common Prayer, including a variation of the *Novus Ordo* as Rite II of the Holy Eucharist. The Peace was

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<sup>1</sup> The Council of Trent actually enacted many of the reforms that had been demanded by the Protestant Reformers, but it was too late. By that time hot heads on both sides had prevailed, and the separation between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism had gone beyond the point of restoration.

<sup>2</sup> This response was recently changed by the Roman Church to the more accurate translation of the ancient Greek and Latin, “And with your spirit.”

included in both Rites I and II, following the Confession and Absolution. The priest says, “The Peace of the Lord be always with you,” and the people respond, “And with thy spirit” (Rite I) or “And also with you” (Rite II).<sup>1</sup> The rubric<sup>2</sup> says, “Then the Ministers and the People may greet one another in the Name of the Lord.” Ironically, most people disliked it at first.

Over the years, most denominations, including our own, have slipped away from the idea of “greet[ing] one another in the Name of the Lord,” and have allowed the Peace to become a social break that is anything but peaceful. The Peace is supposed to be a simple, warm and courteous greeting in the Name of Christ. Today people travel around from pew to pew, visiting and chatting about everything. Elijah heard God in a still small voice, not in the roar of the whirlwind. I have been in some churches where the noise is so loud that one has to raise his voice to be heard, causing all the others to raise their own voices even more. Rather than a peaceful interlude, it has become a jarring rupture between the Liturgy of the Word and the Great Thanksgiving. After this, the people are expected to return to a peaceful state of worshipful focus as we share in Christ’s sacrifice and consecrate the Blessed Sacrament. That can be a very difficult transition.

The Incarnate Son of God is physically present in the church in the Blessed Sacrament. Whether the Sacrament is exposed on the altar or in repose in the Tabernacle, Christ is nonetheless present, and should be the constant focus of our attention. Socializing and visiting together are good and pleasant things, but to turn our attention from Christ to each other is not something that we should be doing in the church. These are for before we enter or after we have left his physical presence.

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<sup>1</sup> For the information of our non-Episcopalian readers, Rite I is essentially the same as the Communion service in the most recent earlier revision, that of 1928. That, in turn, is a direct descendant of the one in the original 1549 Book of Common Prayer. Rite II differs from it significantly.

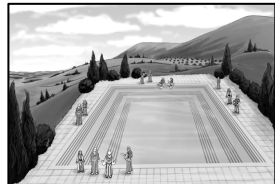
<sup>2</sup> A rubric (so called because it was originally printed in red) is a liturgical instruction intended to guide the leader or congregation.

It is for this reason that St. James' Church moved the Peace to the end of the service. By then we have experienced the ultimate Peace in receiving Holy Communion; the Peace of God that passes all understanding has just been pronounced upon us; and we are about to be dismissed to "go in peace to love and serve the Lord." That seems to be an ideal time not to socialize, but to "greet one another in the Name of the Lord" in the traditional dignified and peaceful manner. Once we have left the presence of Christ, we can and should socialize.

*Richard R. Losch+*

## ***The Pool of Siloam***

The Pool of Siloam, the place where Jesus healed the blind man (John 9:1-11), is a sacred Christian site. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, the Byzantine empress Eudocia identified the site and built a church that has been a destination for pilgrims for over 1500 years. Archaeologists, however, have been convinced for over a century that it was the wrong site, and Siloam's true location remained a mystery. A chance discovery solved the mystery in June of 2004. In Israel, all major construction jobs have archaeologists on the site just in case something might be uncovered. A sewer line broke south of the Temple Mount, on the southern end of the old section of Jerusalem known as the City of David. In the excavation to repair it, the archaeologists spotted two stones that were clearly ancient steps. Further excavation revealed that they were part of a huge pool from the Second Temple period, which was the time that Jesus lived. It was 225' long and slightly trapezoidal in shape. It had been fed from the Gihon spring in the Kidron Valley. Water of that quality would have qualified it to have been used as a reservoir for the city's water. It could also have been a mikvah, a ritual bath used by the Temple priests to purify themselves in preparation for offering sacri-



fices. On the other hand, mikvahs were usually much smaller. Scholars suggested it as a possibility because Jesus told the blind man to go to the pool and wash his eyes (John 9:7). It might also have been a royal Roman-style swimming pool, but that is the least likely possibility. In any case, archaeologists have little doubt that this is the Bible's Pool of Siloam. It was destroyed and filled with rubble when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. Only part of the pool has been excavated, as a large part of it is under an ancient Greek Orthodox church.

The origin of the pool goes back centuries before Jesus. In the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, Jerusalem was threatened with a siege by the Assyrian king Sennacherib. King Hezekiah erected enormous walls around the city. To ensure that the city would have water during the siege, he then dug a 1750' tunnel from the Gihon spring into the city, building a pool inside the city walls to store the water. This was a monumental achievement that would be impressive even with today's engineering technology. In the subsequent years, several pools were built to store water from Hezekiah's tunnel. The pool that the empress Eudocia identified would have been one of these. The Pool of Siloam that was recently discovered would have been built much later, and was possibly expanded as a part of Herod's project of rebuilding the Temple, starting in 37 BC.

The discovery of the Pool Siloam is one more in a series of archaeological discoveries that continue to confirm and validate the stories we read in the Bible.

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## ***The Epistle is Online***

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

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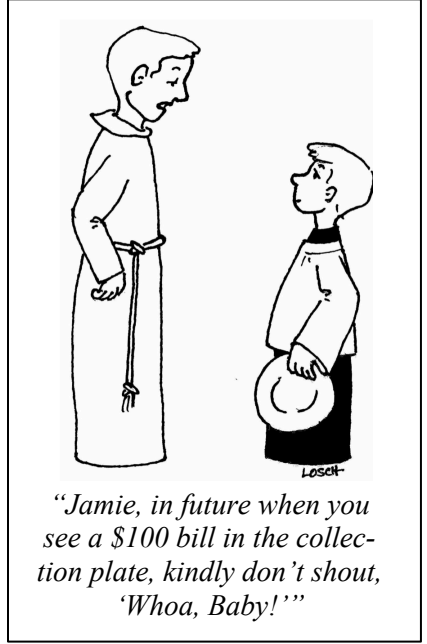
# A Touch of Trivia

President Andrew Jackson died on June 8, 1845. Thousands gathered for his obsequies at The Hermitage, his Tennessee home near Nashville; but Poll, his pet African gray parrot, was the star of the show. The foul-mouthed fowl began screaming vile obscenities during the funeral. He was removed by a Poll-bearer, but not before he had taught many demure Southern ladies some language that they at least claimed never to have heard before. Poll's fate is unknown, but his fame is secured in history.

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