

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



Volume XXVIII, Number 10

November 2020



November 2020

This Month's Cover

Our cover painting this month is *The Day of the Dead* by William-Adolphe Bouguereau. It recognizes the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed ("All Souls Day," Nov. 2). Completed in 1859, it is oil on canvas, measuring 4'10"x3'11". It is displayed in the Museum of Fine Arts in Bordeaux, France. The painting depicts two weeping women, perhaps a mother and daughter, placing wreaths on a grave, presumably that of her husband. The day looks like a typical drear day in early November, with just a small patch of blue in the sky. The women are dressed in black and the older woman is veiled, the traditional Victorian mourning garb ("widow's weeds") that was worn for a year after the death of a spouse or parent.

While this may seem a gloomy way to introduce the usually joyful season of Thanksgiving and Christmas, it is an appropriate way to wind up the Church Year (which ends this year on November 28). On November 1, All Saints Day, we honor all holy things. We are also aware that the world is filled with holy people whose quiet saintliness is known only to God, and who may well end up among the greatest of the saints in heaven without their holiness ever being recognized during their earthly lives. These we honor on the next day, All Souls Day, and pray for their intercession for us. We also pray for all those forgotten souls who have no one else on earth to pray for their continued spiritual growth in the Church Expectant.

William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1905) was a French painter who was recognized as one of the main leaders of the Academic school. This was a combination of the Neoclassic and Romantic styles, and it was particularly popular in the mid-19th century. Bouguereau enjoyed extraordinary popularity in

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both Europe and the United States. He was honored with a great number of awards, and received top prices for his work. He was despised by the avant-garde Impressionists, whose work would not gain general popularity until much later. Vincent van Gogh, whose paintings now sell for millions, could get only a few francs for his work during his lifetime. Bouguereau is known to have completed at least 822 paintings, although a great many are in private collections and their locations are unknown. Many were probably destroyed in the bombings of European cities during world War II.

By the end of the 19th century public tastes had changed, and Bouguereau had fallen out of favor. The Academic style was considered stilted and rather “camp.” By the end of the 20th century, however, an interest in Academic art revived, and a new appreciation of his genius resurged. Today his works are greatly prized as examples of the height of Victorian art.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

The year 2020 will be long remembered as a year we would rather forget. It has been a year of general chaos, a global pandemic, rioting, arson and looting in many major cities, historically destructive tornadoes, hateful and violent political division, record-breaking hurricanes, the worst wildfires in history, and a close miss of an asteroid this month. God only knows what may be in store for us for the remainder of the year, but at the current rate it could be Godzilla. Some say that it is the beginning of the End Times, and others that it is God’s punishment for our faithlessness and immorality. I do not believe that it is either. The Incarnate Son of God said that it is not given even to him to know when the End Times will come, so it seems pretty arrogant to think that we can figure it out for ourselves. As for punishment, I also do not believe that God sends calamity in this life either to individuals or to nations as a punishment for their sins. That is the “Problem of Pain” –why a loving God allows his creatures to suffer. Far greater minds

than ours have explored this for millennia, so it is well beyond the scope of a newsletter editorial. There is a great difference between God's causing disaster and his merely allowing it.

I believe that in the course of human history, two nations have been especially blessed by God. They are ancient Israel and the United States of America. When Israel turned its back on God despite many warnings through the prophets, he withdrew his blessing. He allowed the nation to fall into the hands of its enemies and eventually to be destroyed and its people dispersed throughout the world. He did not send these enemies to them as punishment, he allowed them to fall upon Israel on the grounds that if Israel turned from him, he would withdraw his blessing and protection from them. They were on their own.

I greatly fear that the United States is teetering on the brink of an equally perilous situation. From our colonial beginnings until the present, we have survived crisis after crisis in which survival at times seemed an impossible dream. Despite our many terrible errors and clear sins, we have nonetheless striven to be "one nation under God, with liberty and justice for all." Even though there has not always been liberty and justice for all, that was nonetheless our goal, and it was one for which we were not afraid to struggle. Because of that, God's blessing and protection saw us through all our perils. We have been and still are far from perfect, but with God's help we still have the potential and the dream to provide liberty and justice for all.

Today our moral fiber is collapsing, and there is an increasing tendency to think that we do not need God. The more we tell God that we do not need him, the closer we come to having him withdraw his blessing and protection and leave us on our own. No 2020 calamity could come even close to the disaster that would be. In 1941 Admiral Yamamoto called us a Sleeping Giant. Without God's blessing and protection, we will be like a sleeping fawn before a pack of ravaging wolves. Pray fervently that we turn about and restore our moral strength, and that God will continue to bless, protect and guide us.

Father Rick Losch

Veteran's Day Commemoration

St. James' will honor our veterans at our service on November 8th. If you have any veteran you would like remembered in our service on that Sunday, please get the name to Hiram Patrenos (205-499-0506 or patrenoj@bellsouth.net) no later than Thursday, November 5th.

Hiram Patrenos

No Community Thanksgiving Service

Because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and continued concerns about gatherings, there will not be a Community Thanksgiving Service this year. However, during the month of November you are asked to bring canned goods which will be given to the Department of Human Resources for distribution to those in need.

Hiram Patrenos

Altar Flower Volunteers

Volunteers are needed to provide altar flowers through the season of Pentecost. A sign-up chart is located in the vestibule. You may use flowers from your yard or, if you wish, make arrangements with a florist to provide them. For more information, please speak with Carolyn Patrenos.

Hiram Patrenos

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 tables next to the alms basins in the back of the church. 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, please make your contribution no later than Sunday, November 29th.

Hiram Patrenos

Every Member Canvass

St. James' will be conducting 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 Treasurer, Hiram Patrenos. Pledge cards are available on the tables next to the alms basins in the back of the church. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James', its mission and work.

Hiram Patrenos

Forward Day by Day

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

Hiram Patrenos

The "House of David" Inscription

One of the most exciting archaeological discoveries of the late 20th century was the 1993 unearthing in Syria of the "House of David" stela (stone inscription), the oldest non-biblical reference to King David. For over a century scoffer have claimed that David was just a King Arthur legend, and that he never really existed. Notwithstanding, there are too many non-biblical historical consistencies with the biblical account to doubt his existence. This discovery, however, specifically mentions the House of David less than 125 years after David's time. It is a victory claim of a king of Aram (Syria), extolling his defeat of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the killing of their kings. It specifically mentions "the king of the House of David (Judah)." Unfortunately, the fragment does not give the names of any of the kings, but it is the consensus of scholars that it refers to the victory of King Hazael of Damascus over King Jehoram of Israel and King Ahazia of Judah in 842 BC.

Richard R. Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

The Word

Saint John's gospel begins, "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn. 1:1). In English the word "word" is very broadly defined, most commonly meaning a unit of speech or writing associated with a specific object, action or concept. Most dictionaries list over 15 variations of its meaning. In Christian discussion, when capitalize, it most commonly refers either to Holy Scripture ("God's Word") or to Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity (as in "the Word became flesh"). The Greek word that we most commonly translate as "word" is *logos* (λογος). It comes from the verb *legein* (λεγειν), to declare. In the 6th century BC the Greek philosopher Heraclitus first used it as a philosophical term meaning a principle of order and knowledge. It entered Jewish philosophy in Jesus' time when the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria drew the distinction between the spoken word and the "inner word" (*logos endiathetos*, λογος ενδιαθετος), which meant "essential being or meaning." He wrote that "the Word (*Logos*) of the living God is the bond of everything, holding all things together and binding all the parts, and it prevents them from being dissolved and separated." It is in this sense that John used it in his gospel. Since then, one of the titles ascribed to Christ is The Word (Ὁ Λογος).

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last seven 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+

Forgiveness will not change the past, but it can change the future.

Dinner in Jesus' Time (Part I)

From time immemorial, human beings have associated their most important events with food. This can range from sharing a snack as we sit down for a pleasant conversation, all the way to the pomp and splendor of a formal banquet. When we socialize, there is probably going to be food present. It was no different in biblical times. The first thing Abraham did when he saw the strangers (God's angels) approaching his camp was to call for a meal to be prepared (Gen. 18:5ff). Jesus' teachings and even his miracles often involved food. Indeed, even today our most sacred interaction with Christ is consuming his Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament. In almost every culture throughout history, food and fellowship have gone together.

The image that most people have of meals in ancient times is inaccurate to say the least. We picture people sitting on chairs at a table, eating from their own plates with a knife and fork just as we do today. It was not at all like that in ancient times. In the first place, a normal diet was quite different from that of today. The common people relied primarily on grain and a few vegetables, and rarely had meat of any sort. Meat was the privilege of the rich. Country folk might occasionally be able to hunt small animals or birds, and those who lived near water might have a bit of fish from time to time, but even for them this was rare. The poor had a sour beer and a cheap fermented drink that was more or less like wine, but real wine was a rare treat for them. The rich, on the other hand, fared better, eating meat, fish and poultry as a regular part of their diet. Even then, though, you probably would not want to join them. From ancient cookbooks we know that many Roman delicacies would gag an average American just to think about them.

By Jesus' time most Jews, even those who rejected other aspects of Greco-Roman culture, had adopted the Greco-Roman methods of eating. This is not surprising, since they differed only slightly from the ancient Middle Eastern customs. If an ancient Jew or Roman saw Leonardo's "Last Supper," as beautiful as it is, he would probably have had no idea what it was

supposed to depict. In the first place, people reclined to eat, they did not sit. It was considered crude and barbarian for a man to eat while sitting except for a quick snack. Reclining at meals was originally a privilege for only free adult males. Women, children and slaves ate apart from men, and sat to do so. By the first century BC, however, reclining was the only socially acceptable way for “nice” people, male or female, to dine.¹ Most modern translations of the Bible yield to a modern understanding of many ancient customs, including this one. For example, they speak of Jesus and his disciples sitting at table, and in the stories of the feeding of the multitudes they have Jesus telling the people to sit on the grass. The Greek can be translated correctly only with the word recline or lie down. There is an entirely different word for sit, and it is not used in any of these circumstances. Jesus reclined at the table with his disciples, and he told the people to recline on the grass.

Diners reclined on cushions on one elbow, and took their food from a low table in front of them. The food was prepared in such a way that it could be eaten with one hand, with several people taking food from the same platter or bowl. There was no need for two hands (such as for cutting food with a knife and fork). Most food was eaten with the fingers or from a utensil much like a modern spoon. The Romans had dinner forks, but they were very expensive to manufacture, so they were uncommon. Two-tined forks were used for cooking and serving the food, but not for eating it. Bread was normally a large round loaf or a flat one like pita. Bread also often served as a napkin. If your fingers got greasy, you would pull off a piece of bread, roll it over your fingers, and either eat it or toss it to the dogs.² Bread was also used to sop up juices. Wine was usually served

¹ At the Passover Seder, one of the Four Questions is, “Why on all other nights do we eat either sitting upright or reclining, but on this night we recline?” Slaves did not recline to eat, so this was a sign that the Israelites had been freed from slavery.

² The Jews rarely allowed dogs in the house, but by Jesus’ time it was common for Roman dining rooms to have a dog or two roaming about.

in a bowl rather than in a glass or in what we envision as a stemmed chalice. Stemmed containers were known, but they were rarely used because it can be awkward trying to drink from one when you are reclining. It was considered quite crass to drink wine straight. Wine was almost always mixed with water, sometimes just a little, and sometimes, if you were simply quenching your thirst, quite a lot. Wine was also often sweetened with honey and flavored with spices.

Although dining rooms could be quite large, that was not the norm. They were usually intentionally small, even in the great villas of the rich. In a good party the guests should all be one group, and it was rude to have side conversations that did not include all the other guests. A dinner party was considered to have gotten out of hand if the guests broke into smaller groups. Generally, about nine or ten was considered the maximum number of diners. The 2nd century philosopher Plutarch wrote, “The size of a party is right so long as it easily remains one party. If it gets too large, so that the guests can no longer talk to each other or enjoy the hospitality together ... then it ceases to be a party at all.” In large banquets the tables and couches were usually arranged so that the guests were broken into groups of about nine. The order of seating at any dinner was very important. The steward,¹ at the direction of the host, determined where each guest should sit. The arrangement was based on the guest’s social status in the hierarchy of patrons and clients. This is what Jesus was talking about when he said to take the lowest seat at a banquet (Lk. 14:10). At a Roman dinner the proper thing was to wait for the steward to seat you.

(Continued next month)

Richard R. Losch+

¹ In a Roman or aristocratic Jewish household, the steward was a slave who oversaw all the other slaves, as well as managing all the household operations, including its finances. He was also responsible for managing his master’s daily schedule. An important duty was to know the social hierarchy of each of his master’s clients. For those familiar with *Downton Abbey*, the steward would have been the ancient equivalent of a combination of social secretary and the butler Carson.

The Churches in Galatia

We all know of Paul's letter to the "Churches in Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), but few know where or exactly what Galatia really was. In fact, biblical scholars for centuries were unclear about it, trying to discern to whom Paul's letter was really written.

In the early 3rd century BC there was a migration of about 20,000 Gauls from west central Europe into Anatolia, the region that we now know as Turkey. The part of northern Anatolia in which they settled came to be known as Galatia, the Place of Gauls. Their major city was Ancyra, now Ankara, the Turkish capital. They were a crude and bellicose people whom no one had been able to subdue, and few wanted to have much to do with them. Besides, their region was geographically isolated by mountains and harsh terrain, so they were pretty much left to themselves for almost two centuries. In 25 BC they succumbed to Roman expansion, and became part of the Senatorial Province of Asia. This is not to be confused with the continent of Asia, which includes the Far East. The Province of Asia included most of the northern Middle East extending to the borders of Parthia (Persia, modern Iran), and the northern portion of modern Syria.¹ After that, Anatolia was unofficially divided into Southern Galatia, which extended to the Mediterranean, and Northern Galatia, the old Gallic lands that extended to the Black Sea. Southern Galatia included the region called Cilicia, whose major city was Tarsus, Paul's birthplace.

For centuries it was assumed that when Paul referred to Galatia he was referring to the ancient Gallic lands in northern Anatolia. If so, then that would mean that there were Christian communities there to whom he was writing. That would then lead us to assume that someone, probably Paul himself, had braved the very dangerous trek into that forbidding northern territory to plant those churches. Modern discoveries, includ-

¹ South of Asia was the Province of Syria, which included Aran (the southern part of modern Syria), Phoenicia (Lebanon), Samaria, Galilee, Judea, Nabatea (Jordan), Armenia, and Mesopotamia (Iraq).

ing documents and inscriptions, have led us to reconsider this view. It has become apparent that southern Anatolia was also regularly referred to as Galatia. The Book of Acts (ch. 13-16) describes Paul's journeys to a number of cities and regions in southern Anatolia, and it may well be those cities to which he was referring when he wrote to the "churches in Galatia."

In short, we do not really know who the Galatians to whom Paul wrote really were. What matters, however, is not who they were, but what he had to say to them. The Epistle to the Galatians is one of his most powerful writings.

Richard R. Losch+

Ancient Christian Symbols

Probably the two most recognized Christian symbols today are the cross and the fish. Although different sects prefer different forms of it, the cross is universally recognized as a symbol of Jesus' crucifixion, and thus of Christianity. The fish, on the other hand, although it is one of the earliest Christian symbols, is preferred today primarily by Evangelical Protestants.

The fish was a logical Christian symbol in early times for a number of reasons. The first Apostles were fishermen, and many of Jesus' teachings and miracles involved fish. Also, the Greek for fish is *ichthus* (ἰχθυς). Capitalized, that is ΙΧΘΥΣ. Those are the initials of the Greek for Jesus Christ,



Symbol of Fish

God's Son, Savior (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτήρ). The symbol usually consists of just two intersecting arcs (see illustration), although it can range from that up to some fairly complicated designs. In ancient times it almost always faced to the left, and that tradition still holds today. Some historians believe that this was because Christianity spread west (to the left on a map) from Jerusalem to Rome. In the days of persecution the fish was a common Christian recognition symbol. It could be quickly and easily drawn in the dust and then as quickly wiped out. At first most non-Christians had no idea what it meant, but before long the enemies of Christianity learned to recognize it.

In ancient Roman cities every outside wall was covered with graffiti, to the point that by comparison it would make modern inner-city walls look bare. They were written in every medium from charcoal or paint to actually chiseling them in. It would not have been at all rare to see a fish that had been scratched on a wall by some Christian when no one was looking.

Although the cross was used as a Christian symbol from earliest times, it was not at all the predominant one until at least the end of the third century AD.¹ There were a number of symbols called Christograms, which were made up of combinations of Greek letters. One of the earliest was the staurogram, also known as the Tau-Rho. This was a ligature of the Greek letters T (*Tau*, T) and R (*Rho*, P).²



Staurogram

Scholars have tried to find some meaning for these letters, and some have come up with some rather arcane explanations. The consensus is that they have no meaning other than that when joined they look like a man on a cross, with the Tau representing the cross and the man's outstretched arms,³ and the head of the Rho representing his head. The word staurogram derives from the Greek *stauros* (σταυρος), cross. The staurogram should not be confused with

¹ It was long believed that the symbol of the cross was never used until at least the late second century, but recent archaeological finds have shown that it was used in various forms, albeit rarely, almost from the beginning.

² Although the Greek Rho looks like our P, it is actually the letter R.

³ Scholars today agree that while there were many variations, the normal cross used by the Romans was T-shaped (the "Tau Cross") rather than the familiar "Latin Cross" generally depicted today. The upright was permanently fixed in the ground, and the victim carried the cross-piece, to which he was tied and then usually nailed at the crucifixion site. This was then hoisted up and laid into a notch at the top of the upright. Even though crucifixion was a common Roman form of execution, it was so gruesome that it was one of those things that people simply did not talk about or even mention in polite conversation. The word itself was considered quite vulgar. As a result, there is amazingly little information in ancient records or literature about how it was actually carried out. Most of what we know about crucifixion today has been gleaned from archaeological discoveries.

the symbol known as the Chi-Rho, which is a monogram made up of the first two letters of “Christ” in Greek (XP). The Chi-Rho is not a symbol of the crucifixion, but simply a monogram. Although no one knows for sure, there is a strong tradition that the symbol that Constantine the Great saw in his vision was the Chi-Rho.¹



Another common monogram was made up of the first three Greek letters of Jesus’ name, *Iota*, *Eta* and *Sigma* (IHS). In liturgical symbolism this is often transcribed as IHS. This is sometimes interpreted to stand for ‘In His Spirit,’ but that is incorrect, as it is simply a Greek monogram.

Crucifixion was a form of execution used primarily for slaves, criminals, and non-Romans, and thus was considered to be supremely shameful. The Jewish Law declared that anyone who “hangs on a tree” was cursed by God (Deut. 21:23, Gal. 3:13 *et al.*). Although this was originally understood to mean anyone who was hanged by a noose, by Roman times it had also come to mean anyone who was crucified. The cross was often euphemized as a tree, as it is today in many hymns. This, along with the cultural contempt for anyone who was crucified, was a major public relations problem for the early Christians. Added to that was the fact that the Christian interpretation of Jesus’ crucifixion as a glorious atoning sacrifice rather than a shameful criminal punishment drove a major wedge between the Jews who followed “the Way” (as the Jesus Movement was originally called) and the rest of the Jews. Gentiles, because they did not really understand it, had less of a problem with much of Christian theology than did the Jews, but they were even more scandalized by the idea of revering anyone who had

¹ Just before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (AD 312), Constantine had a vision of a symbol of Christ, and heard the words, “*In hoc signo vinces,*” “In this sign you conquer.” He ordered that all his soldiers inscribe that symbol on their shields. He defeated the emperor Maxentius, whose army greatly outnumbered his. He became the sole emperor of the Roman Empire, legalized Christianity, and banned persecution. Different legends identify the symbol as the Cross, the Chi-Rho or the staurogram.

been crucified.¹ The Jews were a bit more understanding of revering the crucified Jesus. They had been subjected to two centuries of often unjust Roman crucifixions, and thus were not quite so quick to condemn victims just for being crucified.

The early Christians were fully aware that the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ were the seminal events that defined their faith. Nonetheless, because of the social stigma of crucifixion, at first they were cautious about making much of it in public except when they were actively trying to convert someone. They therefore rarely used the cross as a symbol of their faith. Rather, they used the staurogram, which without explanation does not immediately make one think of crucifixion as a cross would do. There is no doubt, however, that to the faithful it was as clear a symbol of Christ's Crucifixion as the Cross or Crucifix is to us today.

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

Most people think that Columbus' three ships were the Niña, the Pinta and the Santa Maria, but that is only partly accurate. It was customary for the Spanish to name ships after saints and then call them by nicknames. The only exception was when a ship was named after the Mother of Christ, as was the Santa Maria. It would not be nicknamed out of veneration for her. Columbus' smallest ship was the Santa Clara, nicknamed *La Niña* (The Little Girl). There is no record of the true name of the second ship, which was nicknamed *La Pinta* (The Painted Lady). The Santa Maria never made it home. It was sunk right after Christmas in 1492 when it hit a reef off the coast of Haiti.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Gentiles had many stories of human sons of gods, although these were the result of sexual encounters between gods and humans. The concepts of the Incarnation and the Hypostatic Union were totally foreign to them. Likewise, there were many myths of gods who were killed and restored to life, but the theology of Resurrection was strictly a Jewish concept (and a relatively late one at that), and would have made little sense to Gentiles.

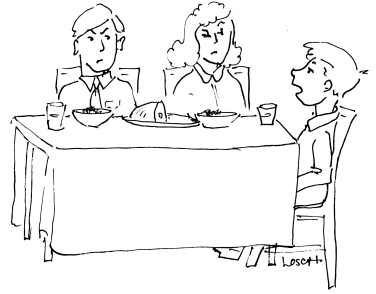
A Touch of Trivia

One of the most popular series in the history of TV is the original *Star Trek*, starring William Shatner as Captain Kirk. Since the origin of the show in 1966 until now, Shatner has never watched a single episode of it. In a recent interview he said, "I never watched *Star Trek*. I have not even seen any of the *Star Trek* movies. I don't watch myself. When I direct and have to look at filmed scenes of my acting, I suck."

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



"The world is torn apart by war, poverty and disease, and you worry about my eating my brussels sprouts."



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