

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
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This Month's Cover

In recognition of the Feast of the Epiphany (January 6), our cover is *Adoration of the Magi* by Defendente Ferrari. Completed in about 1520, it is oil on a wood panel, and is about 8'7"x6'1" in size. It is an altarpiece whose top was originally curved as shown. It is displayed in the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, who purchased in 1974 it from the Contini-Bonacossi Family of Florence. In its 500 years it has passed through a number of collections, including that of King Victor Emmanuel II. It depicts the three Magi in adoration of the infant Christ. Two are kneeling before him, and the third (with the halo) is standing by the curtain behind the Blessed Virgin. Those standing by represent the retinue of the Magi. Many of them undoubtedly have the faces of local wealthy dignitaries, probably those who paid for the altarpiece. This was a common practice in Italian Renaissance art. The church for which the altarpiece was painted is unknown, but it is likely that it was a church in Turin, where scholars believe Ferrari did most of his work. He followed the Dutch tradition of painting intricate details such as jewels, rich brocades and other fabrics, and distinctive faces.

Although there is a tradition of their being three kings, the Bible does not say how many, or that they were kings. The number three undoubtedly comes from there being three gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matt. 2:11). In medieval and Renaissance tradition they are depicted as Caucasian, Oriental and Black, representing the three known continents of Europe Asia and Africa. They also were definitely not kings, but Magi, who were powerful Zoroastrian astrologers from Persia.

Little is known about Defendente Ferrari. He was active c.1500-c.1535. There is no record of his birth, but evidence

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indicates that he was born in Chivasso, near Turin, in northwest Italy, where he trained in the workshop of Giovanni Martino Spanzotti. He was best known for his painting of altarpieces and polyptychs (altar and sanctuary pieces made up of several separate panels), but he was also noted for several beautiful nocturnal scenes. He signed very few of his religious works, but his distinctive style has enabled critics to identify most of his work. During the Renaissance it was common among Flemish and Dutch painters to leave their religious works unsigned, as they were done to the glory of God and not of the painter. Ferrari was Italian, but his work shows strong Dutch influence, although its source is unknown. It is not known when he died, but presumably is was soon after his last known work in 1535.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

A culture is a system of values, customs, standards and achievements held in common by a group of people. A society is a group of people living together in an ordered community with a common culture or mutually shared cultures. One of the things that made America so successful was that immigrants from all over the world brought their own cultures with them, and much of this was absorbed into a uniquely American culture that was enriched by the sharing of customs and ideas. While still retaining a pride in their heritage, these people adapted to this American culture and sought to be Americans. This is what is meant by “the great American melting pot.”

It is said that you should always be careful what you ask for, because you might just get it. This becomes painfully evident when we recognize that our society today is about as badly divided as it has ever been in history. It is fragmented along lines not only of race and political beliefs, but also of ideologies, ethnicities, values, wealth, religion, moral standards, and even daily living customs. For many years we have sought to strengthen our society by worshiping at the altar of what is commonly called “diversity.” It appears that the result

has been the reverse of what we had hoped for. In an attempt to overcome racism, we have obsessively focused on people's race. That is the very definition of racism, and it has resulted in ever increasing racial tension. In an attempt to protect the weak from oppression, we have continually pushed the idea that our whole society is based on conflict between victims and victimizers. In an attempt to be "tolerant" we have made such an issue of people's sexual orientation that one would think that this is the defining factor of who a person is. The result has been to make many less tolerant of those who by their standards deviate from the norm (whatever that may be). I do not understand why the media feel they must report that when robbing a bank, a gay white man shot a black Catholic guard, when all that is relevant is that a man shot a guard.

The question is, of course, what we can do about this mess we have gotten ourselves into? Experience has shown that legislation and activist movements rarely help, and more often than not they make things worse. Prayer is important, of course, but prayer, like talk, is of little effect if it is not accompanied by action. It will, however, give us the wisdom, strength and courage to act. And what action should we take? Morgan Freeman said that if you want to eliminate racism, just stop talking about it. If we decide that we are no longer willing to enable these divisive obsessions, they might just end. Simply refuse to play the game. It might just work.

Father Rick Rosch+

Be Wordly Wise

Proletarian

A proletarian is a member of the proletariat, which is the lowest or poorest class of a society, usually the unskilled laboring class. It is often slangily shortened to prole. In common usage proletarian has also come to be synonymous with lowly, vile and vulgar. It was first used in this sense in 1630, although it became a familiar term to many after Karl Marx used it liberally (pun intended) to mean the entire laboring class. It

derives from the Latin *proletarius*, a member of the lowest free Roman social subclass, those who owned no property.

Ancient Rome had a strict class system. It was primarily based on a man's property and financial holdings, although his family and ancestral lineage also played a very important part. A woman's class was automatically that of her father or husband. There were three main classes: Senatorial, Equestrian and Plebeian. To be a Senator a man had to be of the Senatorial class, which was primarily made up of the oldest, richest and most powerful families. The top subclass of the Senatorial class were the Patricians, who allegedly could trace their ancestry back to the founding families of Rome. The Equestrians (knights) were minor nobility who could not claim Senatorial status, but (as the name implies) could afford to own horses, an extremely expensive status symbol. The Plebeians were all rest of the free men, and they ranged from the fairly rich to the impoverished. A subclass of the Plebeians was the *proletarii*, those who owned no property. The word derives from *proles*, offspring, and the suffix *-tarius*, one who has or is involved with something.¹ The *proletarii* had no vote, but as recompense they were exempt from taxes and military service.² The only thing they could offer the state was *proles*, offspring, so they were *prole-tarii*, those who are involved with offspring. Proletarians, then, were child-bearers. Our words prolific, proliferate and proliferate also come from *proles*.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ *Dignitarian*: worthy; *authoritarian*: involved with authority.

² Julius Caesar's uncle Gaius Marius, a prime contributor to the eventual collapse of the Roman Republic, was the first to allow the *proletarii* to serve in the army. Before that soldiers had to have enough money to provide their own armor, weapons and supplies. Their pay was minimal, and they served for the honor of fighting for Rome. Marius permitted the *proletarii* to serve at state expense. They were paid mainly from the booty of war that was dispensed to them by their general. This made them more loyal to their general than to Rome, and established in effect a system of generals with private armies. This is why Caesar could so easily march on Rome on January 10, 49 BC. He had his own loyal army supporting him.

East is East, and West is West...

In AD 1054 Pope Leo IX sent his legate Umberto da Silva-Candida and two other delegates on a mission to Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. William Duke of Normandy (later called “the Conqueror”) was preparing to invade Sicily, and Pope Leo was seeking military aid from the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX to help drive back the Normans. Relations between the several western kingdoms and the eastern Byzantine Empire, while not warm, were at least not all that bad at that time.¹ Notwithstanding, tension within the worldwide One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church had been growing increasingly stronger for several centuries. The government of the Church was shared allegedly equally between five so-called Patriarchs, who were the Bishops of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria and Rome. Each governed his own patriarchate, but all doctrinal and liturgical issues were supposed to be decided by all five in council.² The Bishop of Rome, however, had by far the largest patriarchate, comprising most of what we now call Western Europe. He had long claimed that as the spiritual descendant of Peter he had superior authority to the other four. Instead of calling himself Patriarch, he called himself Papa, which we translate as Pope.³ The other four patriarchs, of course, denied this claim, and by 1054 this tension was reaching the boiling point.

The Patriarch of Constantinople in 1054 was Michael Celularius, who was noted for being a hothead. Equally hotheaded, unfortunately, was Pope Leo’s legate Umberto. Even begore Constantine could be approached to appeal for military aid for

¹ Relations would become strained to say the least a half century later after the Crusades began.

² The Bishop of Moscow was considered relatively unimportant at the time, and Moscow did not become a major patriarchate, participating in theological and liturgical decisions, until much later.

³ Yes, that is Papa as we normally think of the word. It is the familiar form of the Latin *pater*, father, and was what Roman children called their father.

Sicily, Celularius and Umberto got into a shouting match over doctrinal and administrative issues. The next morning, just before the beginning of Mass (or the Divine Liturgy, as it is called in the East), Umberto walked up to the high altar of the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia and laid on it a bull excommunicating Celularius and all who worked with him. Celularius read it, and walked over to the thurible (incense burner) and burned it. Four days later he excommunicated Umberto and his whole delegation, who left immediately in a rage and returned to Rome. Most of the officials in Constantinople, including contemporary historians, considered this nothing more than a temper tantrum between two hotheads, and dismissed it as insignificant. In Rome, however, it was looked on as the irrevocable split between the Eastern and Western Churches, and it has since been called the Great Schism of 1054. To this day the Roman Catholic Church in the west and the Orthodox Churches in the east, even though their theological differences are relatively minor, have never been reunited. That division was exacerbated five centuries later when the Protestant Reformation split up the western Church even more.

The Eastern and Western branches of the Church had been pulling away from each other for centuries. Originally the whole Church, east and west, spoke Greek as its official language. By the end of the 4th century the Western Church had moved to Latin, which was the vernacular, while the Eastern Church retained Greek, which was the vernacular there. Historians generally refer to the Churches after that time as the Latin and Greek Churches.¹ By 1054 the liturgies had also become quite different, reflecting the great differences between of the eastern and western cultures. Administratively, in the west the Pope claimed total authority over the entire Christian Church, while in the east the Patriarchs, who claimed the Pope was one of them and that all were equal, ruled as a council. They did

¹ Because of that many people incorrectly refer to any of the several Eastern Orthodox Churches (which now use a variety of languages) as Greek Orthodox Churches.

not reject the Pope, but only his primacy. This was undoubtedly the most important factor that led to the schism. The theological differences between the Latin and Greek Churches are quite small, and are only a tripping-stone rather than a great stumbling-block toward their ultimate reunification. The greatest stumbling-block is Papal versus Patriarchal authority.

A common incorrect impression is that the major cause of the split was a phrase in the Nicene Creed called the *filioque* clause. That was merely a symptom, and not the cause. For centuries theologians had argued over whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, or from the Father and the Son. There are strong theological arguments on both sides, but from a larger point of view it is not all that critical a difference. In Latin the phrase “and the Son” is *filioque*. In AD 325 the Council of Nicaea, which drew up the first form of the Nicene Creed, had in it, “We believe in the Holy Spirit, . . . who proceeds from the Father.” It did not say “from the Father and the Son.” This was never changed in any of the subsequent ecumenical councils that updated the Creed. In spite of that, by the 6th century more and more bishops in the western (Latin) branch of the Church, with the assent of the Pope, authorized the addition of *filioque*. Finally, in 1014, forty years before the schism, Pope Benedict VIII officially authorized its use in the west. For 500 years the eastern patriarchs had been telling the popes that they had no authority to do that, but their warnings had been ignored. While it was not a major theological issue, it had become a critical issue of ecclesiastical authority. This is what Umberto and Celularius were arguing about—not whether *filioque* was right or wrong, but whether the Pope had the authority to change the Creed by adding it. Both let their tempers take the lead over reason and Christian love, and as a result the Church has been split apart for a thousand years.

Richard R. Losch+

“Life is good when you are happy, but it is much better when others are happy because of you.”

—Pope Francis

How We Interpret the Bible

Trying to write an essay on how we interpret the Bible is rather like trying to write about how to listen to music. The ways are countless. To start, we should limit our consideration to those who believe that in one way or other the Bible reflects divine truth—i.e., those who believe that God exists, and that the Bible is the Word of God, whatever they may mean by that phrase. This at least eliminates those who think that the Bible is simply a collection of lovely old myths and fables dreamed up by humans in order to explain phenomena and teach moral values. Even among those who believe that it is the Word of God, we are faced with a broad spectrum. On one end are those who believe that God dictated the Bible word for word to a collection of scribes over the years (and some act as if they think he dictated it in Jacobean English), and at the other end are those who believe that God simply inspired the writers with an idea of what he wanted them to communicate, and left it up to them to flesh it out. When a prophet said, “Thus says the Lord ...” did he mean, “These are the exact words that God told me to pass on to you,” or “Here is the thought that God wants me to communicate to you”?

Many people have the misconception that people took the Bible literally, word-for-word, until the Age of the Enlightenment (18th and early 19th centuries). In fact, from the early days of Judaism scholars explored to what extent their Scriptures¹ should be taken literally, or explored for their allegorical meanings. For example, the contradictions in the two creation stories in Genesis did not escape the early scholars, and surely did not escape the writers who first compiled the book. Taken literally with only their surface meaning, they present a serious prob-

¹ There was no such thing as a Bible until the Christian Church canonized it in AD 325, and Judaism canonized the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) in the 7th century AD. Before that there was simply a collection of sacred writings, called the Scriptures, generally recognized as authoritatively reflecting the Word of God. The Septuagint is the 3rd century BC Greek translation of what was then the most widely accepted collection of these Scriptures.

lem; but taken allegorically they are fully compatible, each enhancing the truths presented by the other.

Saint Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430) recognized that a literal interpretation is too simplistic, although it is sufficient for those who are incapable of deeper understanding. A small child hears a fairy tale and accepts it just as it is told to him. As he matures, however, he becomes increasingly able to fathom its symbolism and see a deeper meaning than is just on the surface. When a little child hears Aesop's fable he believes that there really was a race between a rabbit and a turtle, even though he may also understand the moral of the story. As he matured he understands that the story is purely an allegory designed to lead up to the moral. Augustine says that if we read the Bible literally we are approaching it as a child, but we can still understand its basic surface teachings. As we mature in our biblical studies and learn to delve into deeper allegorical meanings, we find deeper and richer teachings that can bring us ever closer to God and the understanding of his will.

The question then arises, how deep can these allegorical meanings become? Saint Bernard of Clairvaux preached regularly to the monks in his abbey. In a period of about 20 years he preached 82 sermons just on the Song of Songs, and in that time never got past the first three chapters. Six of the first eight sermons were on just the second verse of the first chapter, in which he dealt with three major theological issues.¹ Granted, this goes far deeper than most of us have either the ability or desire to probe, and it probably pushes the envelope a bit far. Each sermon took hours of prayer and meditation to prepare. Nonetheless, this shows the breadth of meaning that can be found if we are willing to work hard enough to find it.

This kind of deep examination of the Bible is impressive, but it can also be dangerous. Without good training and guidance, it is easy to go off in a completely wrong direction, finding things that are not at all really there, and that are contra-

¹ The love of God for his creation, the love of Christ for his Church, and the Holy Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and the Son.

dictory to the truth that has clearly been revealed to the Church.

Erasmus (1466-1536) encouraged everyone to read the Bible, but only in the original Hebrew and Greek. He said that if you do not have enough education to do that, you do not have enough education to interpret the Bible correctly. He tried to talk Luther out of translating the Bible into German, because he said that if everyone could read it they would all interpret it differently, and soon there would be 1,000 different interpretations. Luther and his Swiss contemporary Ulrich Zwingli argued that the Bible is so clear that only one interpretation is possible. At the Colloquy of Marburg in 1529 it became clear to them both that this was not quite so. As an example, Luther said that Christ's words at the Last Supper, "This is my Body," were literally true. He affirmed the Real Presence, that at the Holy Eucharist the bread does indeed become the true Body of Christ under the physical appearance of bread. Zwingli said that this is nonsense, that it was purely symbolic. On the other hand, Zwingli argued that when the Bible says that Jesus sits at the right hand of God (Matt. 26:6 et al.), it is literally true, whatever the phrase "right hand" symbolizes. Since Jesus has a human nature he cannot be everywhere at once, so he must be in one single place. Luther said that this is nonsense, that it was purely symbolic. Luther took "This is my Body" as literally true and being seated at the right hand of God as purely symbolic. Zwingli took exactly the reverse stand, and the two finally admitted that maybe the Bible is not as patently clear as they thought. Unfortunately, each left convinced that he was right and the other was wrong, and Protestantism became increasingly fragmented over the next centuries due to the widening variety of biblical interpretations.¹

The traditional approach is that there is such a breadth of allegory in the Bible that no one individual can be assured of

¹ Today the World Council of Churches identifies over 9,000 Protestant denominations, and if you include all the splinter sects that are usually represented by storefront churches and little country roadside chapels, there are over 40,000.

the correct interpretation. Rather, the Holy Spirit will bring the Church to an understanding of the truth by means of councils that are guided by the counsel of scholars and theologians whose wisdom has become evident over the years. The Protestant approach is that learned men will find the truth through faith and the virtue of “perspicuity,” which is insight given by the Holy Spirit to truly righteous and faithful people.

The ultimate problem is how each of us as faithful Christians should interpret the Bible. If interpretation means the establishment of doctrine, we should not. At least most of us, including most of us with seminary degrees, should not, because most of us are not qualified to do so. Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, while I disagree with much of their theology, were at least biblical scholars and trained theologians. That does at all mean, however, that we should not read the Bible and try to discern what it is saying to us. To the contrary, we should read it diligently and prayerfully, and pay close attention to what it says to us not only on the surface, but through its allegory. I could not count the times that I have read a familiar passage that I have read many times before, when something brand new jumps out at me that I had never thought of before. What we must remember is that just because we have found a new meaning or a new point of view in what we have read, we have not necessarily found a new truth that justifies changing or discarding a teaching of the Church. The Church heeds the teachings of such as Origen, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas not just because they came up with new ideas, but because countless wise men over many years of prayer, meditation and study have found their ideas worth heeding. As long as the new understandings that we find in our study of the Bible, and I hope they are many, bring us to a closer understanding and love of Christ, they are worth our attention. We must also, however, retain the Christian humility to recognize that while they may be profound to us, they are God’s persona; gift to us, not our gift to the world.

Richard R. Losch+

The Great Equalizers

Ecclesiastes said of death, “As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me” (Eccles. 2:15). Whether it happens in a luxurious royal bed or in a squalid gutter, death is called the Great Equalizer because it is something that happens to all of us. There is another equalizer that it pretty hard to make noble or romanticize as we often do with death, and that is the basic bodily functions. As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me. Recently, in the excavation in Jerusalem of a 2700-year-old palace, archaeologists from the Israel Antiquities Authority came across something totally unexpected. It was a private toilet. In those days people recognized that this was something everyone had in common, and were not as touchy about their privacy as we are today. Usually the closest thing that even the very rich had to a private latrine was one that accommodated several people but was used only by the family and servants.¹ This was true throughout the ancient world. This toilet was a real surprise to the archaeologists because it is completely private. It has one seat situated in a rectangular stone outhouse. It is carved from a single block of limestone and placed over a deep septic tank carved out of the bedrock. Very few private toilets have ever been found from that era, or even into much later times,² so this discovery was quite unexpected.

The palace where this was found overlooks the Old City in Jerusalem. It dates back to the about the 7th century BC, the First Temple Era, shortly before the time that the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and exiled its people. The palace may have belonged to one of the last kings of Judah. The outhouse was in a lush ornamental garden decorated with ornately carved stone columns. This was obviously the palace of an extremely rich man, most likely the king.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Fans of “I, Claudius” will remember the scene where the Emperor Claudius is using what looks like a public latrine.

² A thousand years later, in the 4th century AD, the Talmud listed criteria by which a man could be deemed rich. One was to have a private toilet.

Wrapped in Swaddling Clothes

Saint Luke tells us that when Jesus was born, Mary “wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger” (Lk. 2:7). This should actually be rendered swaddling *cloths*, not clothes. Swaddling cloths were not a garment. They were bands of cloth that were used to wrap infants. In ancient times when a baby was born it was washed, then dusted with finely powdered salt and wrapped in these bands of cloth. The arms and legs were rendered relatively immobile. The thinking was presumably that this not only protected the baby from injury, but gave him a sense of security.¹ This was something that was normally ready when a woman was about to give birth, and that Mary, knowing that she would be giving birth, might very well have brought with her on the journey to Bethlehem. In the homes of the rich the swaddling bands were often made of fine fabrics and beautifully embroidered, but among the poor they were usually quite simple.

The question is often raised, if this was such a common practice, why does Luke mention it twice, at his birth and again in the angel’s announcement to the shepherds (2:12)?² The angel said that the shepherds would find Jesus wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger, but when they found him only the manger is mentioned (2:16). A baby in a manger would be unusual and significant, but his swaddling bands would not. Most interpreters see this as emphasizing to the shepherds that Jesus was a newborn infant, not an older baby. The theological significance, however, is important. When the Son of God took upon himself human nature, he took upon himself every aspect of humanity, including the utter helplessness and dependence of a newborn. He did not simply appear as an adult human, but underwent infancy and childhood, with

¹ There may be something to that. If a dog is frightened, putting him into a tight garment of some sort will often calm him. Many pet stores sell one called a “Thundershirt.”

² It is also mentioned in Job 38:9 and Wisdom 7:4.

all the pains and perils that that entails.

There is another interpretation of swaddling cloths that is not widely accepted, and that many theologians believe is “pushing the envelope” a bit. However, it has been going around Facebook and other media quite a bit this Christmas, and so should be mentioned. If a lamb were to be a sacrificial offering in the Temple, it must be perfect and unblemished. The flocks around Bethlehem were a major source of lambs for the Temple, as Jerusalem is only about six miles away, and this was a good source of income for the shepherds. When a lamb was born, it was carefully inspected. If found to be suitable, it was wrapped in cloths similar to swaddling bands to keep it from injury during the first and most vulnerable time of its life. Some propose that when Mary and Joseph found refuge among the animals there were some of these band there, and Mary used them to wrap Jesus. The theological significance of this would be that Jesus, the Lamb of God who would be sacrificed on the cross 33 years later, was wrapped in swaddling bands as a newborn sacrificial lamb would be. It is not likely, however, that the shepherds would have seen the significance of this, since wrapping babies in swaddling cloths was standard practice. Also, even if they did recognize him as the promised Messiah, at that time no one dreamed that the Messiah would be crucified. The Apostles themselves did not understand that, even when Jesus clearly told them.

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

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Richard R. Losch+

*If you think there is no prayer in school, you have not been there
when semester exams are about to begin.*

A Touch of Trivia

No offense is intended toward our readers in Chicago, but the name of their city means “stinking onion.” The city is built on a marsh along what is now called the Chicago River. It was abundant with a foul-tasting wild onion with an unpleasantly skunky odor. The Illinois Indians called it *shikaakwa*, and they named the marsh after it. When the French settlers built there they kept the name, spelling it in French as it sounded to them, Chicagoua.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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