

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



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February 2015

This Month's Cover

Our cover picture this month is *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*, painted in 1524 by Jan van Scorel (Schoorel) (1495-1562). It is oil on wood, and while it gives the impression of being very large, it is only about 35"x45" in size. It was originally painted as a panel in an altar piece. It is displayed in the Kunsthistorisches (Art History) Museum in Vienna.

It was an ancient Jewish custom to offer every son to God, not as a sacrifice, but to dedicate him to God's service.¹ This was done forty days after birth. Pregnancy and childbirth made a woman ritually unclean, and at the presentation of the child to God she was "purified" (declared clean). The Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, also known as the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, falls on February 2, forty days after Christmas.

In the painting we see Mary, having presented the infant Jesus to the priest, offering the required sacrifice of two turtledoves (Lk. 2:24). It is not clear who the other characters in the painting are, but we can make some assumptions. The man behind Mary, holding a candlestick, may be Joseph. The old woman to the left of the priest may be the prophetess Anna (Lk. 2:36ff). The young boy with the candlestick is too old to be John the Baptist, but he may represent a boy being

raised in the Temple by the priests, like Samuel. The woman with the baby on her back may be another woman about to present her child. The white-bearded man may represent the righteous old man Simeon (Lk. 2:25ff).

Jan van Scorel was one of the greatest painters of the Northern Renaissance, and was the first Dutch painter of any significance to study in Italy. He was born in 1495 in Schoorl, north of Alkmaar in the Netherlands. It is not known where he began his studies, but he was strongly influenced by Jacob Cornelisz and Jan Gossaert. There is evidence that in his early life he studied under Dürer.

Van Scorel traveled extensively, and was very well educated. He was an accomplished architect and engineer, and was fluent in several languages. He designed a polder² that is still in use today.

In 1520 van Scorel completed his first important work, the "Sippenaltar" in St. Martin's Church in Obervellach, Austria. From there he went to Venice, where he studied for two years. He then went to Rome, from which he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem that influenced many of his later works. While in Rome he met the Dutch pope Hadrian VI, who named him the official Vatican painter. He returned to the Netherlands in 1524, and remained there until his death in 1562. He left a huge number of paintings, but most of them were destroyed in the Dutch Iconoclastic movement in 1566.

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¹ In earlier times the child might be given to the Temple to be raised by the priests. This is how the prophet Samuel came to be raised by the priest Eli (1 Sam. 1:26ff).

² A polder is a piece of land below sea level that is reclaimed and protected by dikes.

A Word from the Editor

When I was a little boy, even though I grew up in New England, I hated winter weather (I still do). I was not fond of February for that reason, although among the winter months it was my second favorite. December, of course, came first because of Christmas. In February we got a day off from school on the 12th for Lincoln's birthday, and on the 22nd for Washington's. Now they are lumped together as Presidents' Day (or is it President's Day?), which is always observed on a Monday. Of course, it was a calamity if either of them fell on a weekend. Back then, to add icing to the cake, on the 14th we had a Valentine's Day party, when we exchanged cards and ate candy in school (the nicer teachers even brought in cupcakes—Michelle Obama would be aghast). Two days off from school, a school party and a short winter month were a combination hard to beat.

It was a simpler time for little children then. We could play together outside until sundown, and our parents weren't afraid that our picture would end up on a milk carton. Most American children were shielded from the horrors of World War II and the lingering deprivations of the Depression. Although we lived in a dangerous world and heard about these things, we were protected by the love and solidarity of Church, community and family, and we felt secure.

In today's society, things have changed radically. Today, children in early elementary school know more about sex, corruption and technology

than most of my generation did when we entered high school. In a more dangerous world than ever, the protections of Church, community and family are crumbling, and in the midst of the decay of our morals and values they are being replaced by a digital and politically correct culture that claims to protect us better than Church, community and family ever could. I do not agree.

Whenever I reminisce about my childhood I am reminded, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mk. 10:14f). There is little we can do to guarantee our physical security in this barbarous and godless world. Our spiritual security is not at risk, however, if we will seek the simple child-like trust in God that Jesus is talking about. There is a huge difference between being child-like and being childish. It is childish to think that we can prosper or even survive by ourselves. This arrogance is what destroyed ancient Israel (Is. 9:10ff), and it will destroy us. To be child-like before God is not to be ignorant or unthinking, it is to be trusting, reliant and humble. These traits do not come easily to us humans, but with a little effort and the help of the Holy Spirit we can develop them.

Pray with the simplicity of a child, and you will be given the wisdom and strength of an adult.

Father Rick Losch

Shrove Tuesday

Our traditional Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper will be held on Tuesday, February 17th, beginning at 5:30 p.m. and ending at 7:00 p.m. A donation is asked of \$5.00 for adults and \$2.00 for children 12 and under. Take-out plates will be available. Please invite your friends and neighbors to join us for this traditional pre-Lenten celebration of Mardi Gras.

Hiram Patrenos

Ash Wednesday

On February 18th our observance of Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, will be held at 12:05 p.m. with a service of Holy Communion and Imposition of Ashes. Please make your plans to begin your observance of the Lenten Season at this special service.

Hiram Patrenos

ECW Antique Alley Yard Sale

The Episcopal Church Women will have a yard sale in May during the Highway 11 Antique Alley Yard Sale. Everyone is encouraged to keep this in mind as they clean attics, storage buildings, and closets. Furniture is especially sought during this sale and we will be happy to help you move any items you wish to contribute. If you have items to be contributed, please speak with Hiram Patrenos to make arrangements to get the items to our storage space.

Hiram Patrenos

Be Wordly Wise A Couple of Snippets

Decimate: This is a commonly misused word these days, especially in the news. It is generally used to indicate that some thing or some group has been nearly wiped out (“the tornado decimated the village” or “the raid decimated the enemy forces”). In ancient Rome, decimation was the punishment of a military unit for cowardice in battle. The soldiers were lined up and each one drew a stone from a bag that contained one stone for each man. Most were white stones, but one tenth of them was black. If a soldier drew a black stone the soldiers next to him were to kill him (if they refused they would be killed themselves). The word derives from the Latin *decimus*, “tenth.”¹ If a village is decimated by a tornado, therefore, one tenth of it is destroyed. A better word to imply nearly total destruction would be “devastated.” This derives from the Latin prefix *de-*, “thoroughly” and *vastare*, “to lay waste.”

Sheriff: A sheriff is the chief law enforcement officer of a county. In medieval England he was the chief officer of all county management, answerable only to the liege lord himself. The word derives from the Old English *shirreeve*, which in turn comes from *shire* (“county”) and *reeve* (“chief political leader”). This derived from the Anglo-Saxon *scirgerefa*, which means the same.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This is also the root of the word “decimal.” Our number system is based on ten.

Never Again!

Concern is increasing around the world that we are on the verge of a second Holocaust at the hands of Islamic extremists. To these fanatics, hatred for Jews transcends what we normally think of as anti-Semitism. It is an irrational desire to exterminate them altogether. The last time we saw this was in the Nazi ideology, which taught that Jews are subhuman, and led to the slaughter of over 6,000,000 of them. There is a picture currently going around the Internet of an ISIS soldier pointing a large knife directly at the camera. The caption is, "I'm coming for you, Jew!" It could just as well be addressed to Christians. Anti-Semitism is on a frighteningly rapid rise throughout Europe and the Middle East, and Christians (who are also under increasing persecution) are failing to speak out against it.

We are constantly reminded that these fanatics represent only about 6% of the world's Muslims, and this is true if not even overstated. That is consoling until we realize that this still means that over 100,000,000 of the world's Muslims are extremists who directly or tacitly support the terrorist ideologies of al-Qaeda and ISIS. Of the 247 nations and dependencies in the world, only 13 have populations larger than that. When we ponder that, the statistics become considerably more daunting.

The Qur'an is hardly warm and friendly to Jews and Christians, but it is a gross misinterpretation of it to claim that it calls for their slaughter. This is exactly how these fanatics in-

terpret it, however. Theologically this is a Muslim problem that only Muslims can fix. In the meantime, however, the whole world, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, is in grave danger at the hands of these fanatics.

Only a tiny percentage of Germans in the early 20th century supported or even approved of the Nazi ideology. In the course of less than ten years, however, the Nazis not only gained absolute power, but so brainwashed a whole generation of children that young boys preferred to die for Hitler rather than surrender, even though they knew there was no chance of victory. They even shot adult German soldiers who tried to surrender. How did the Nazis accomplish this? Their propaganda was beautifully crafted, especially in the propaganda promulgated among the Hitler Youth. They had three other weapons, however, which are almost insurmountable: fear, ignorance and apathy. The last two are by far the most deadly. At first the Germans did not understand the enormity of what was happening, and they did not want to get involved. By the time it was evident what was happening it was too late to stop it. Remember that Hitler was legally elected in an election with a pitifully small voter turnout.

We see the same thing happening again today. As Hitler turned a generation of little children into loyal Nazis, so do the Madrassas teach little children that Jews are vermin, and that the quickest way please Allah and get to heaven is to die killing Jews and Christians. Within the Muslim

world, the vast majority does not approve of what is being done in the name of Islam. Even though we saw people dancing in the streets on 9/11 and after the recent *Charlie Hebdo* massacre, I cannot believe that they represent more than a tiny portion of Muslims. But where is the voice of outrage from the rest? It is muffled in their fear, ignorance and apathy. If they will not speak out, however, they make themselves irrelevant. On the other hand, we must not underestimate the courage of Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who spoke out eloquently against Islamic fanaticism to a meeting of over 100 imams. He placed his safety and his political future in jeopardy by doing so.

You may say, “Well, what can I do about it? I have no authority or influence.” Not so! There is a huge amount that we can do, although it will require some courage and some effort. The next time you hear an anti-Semitic slur, don’t encourage it by agreeing or by ignoring it. Speak up. Remember, after all, that Jesus was a Jew—does that anti-Semitic slur apply to him? Even more important is to use the most powerful tool we have as Christians. That is the power of prayer. Never underestimate it. If we pray for courage for the frightened, enlightenment of the ignorant and the stirring up of the apathetic, we may well be surprised at how much we ourselves become encouraged, enlightened and stirred up. This is all we need to be well prepared to fight for what is right and pleasing to God.

Richard R. Losch+

Lent Approaches

The season of Lent is almost upon us, and it’s time once again to consider our Lenten self-disciplines. The old idea of giving up something for Lent has some validity, but it also has some pitfalls. Self-denial is a great discipline, but only when it is done for the right reason. Giving up chocolate is great if every time you crave it you are reminded of the sacrifice of Christ; but it borders on the worthless if you do it because you need to lose some weight. As a recovered smoker I can attest from experience that giving up tobacco for Lent doesn’t work. Instead of making you think of the love of God, all that happens is that several times a day you think, “God how I’d love to have a cigarette!”

A far better discipline than self-denial is to take on something extra. If you are not a regular Bible reader, commit yourself to read a few verses a day. If you read the Bible, set aside a few minutes each day to meditate on what you have read. You don’t have to be an expert on meditation to do so—just sit quietly and think about what the passage really says to you, and how you can apply it to your life. If you pray regularly, do a bit more, especially regarding prayer for others rather than for yourself. If you don’t pray regularly, do so. Praying a few minutes every day is vastly more powerful than praying an hour only once in a while. Start thinking now about what you will do for Lent, and may your Lenten discipline be a blessing to you.

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle to the Romans

Most of Paul's letters were written to deal with specific problems in specific churches around the Roman world. The Epistle to the Hebrews is a theological document, but Paul did not write it.¹ Galatians touches on a number of theological issues, but does not explore them thoroughly. Romans, on the other hand, is a theological masterpiece that had a more profound effect on Western faith and culture than any other document in the Bible, including the four gospels.

It has been said that while Jesus laid the foundations of Christianity, Paul invented the religion, based on Jesus' teachings. Nothing could be further from the truth. Paul expounded on what was already being taught by Christians around the known world. Her did not invent a new theology, but simply clarified and explained what was already being taught and believed. He claimed that he did not teach what had been taught to him by others, but rather what had been revealed to him directly by Christ. It is also patently clear throughout his writings, though, that he never claimed to teach anything that had not already been revealed to the Apostles at Pentecost. He occasionally disagreed with them on the interpretation of that revelation, but he and the other

Apostles worked out their differences and eventually were in accord.² Paul did not "invent" anything new in Christian theology. His teachings were meant to clarify, not to create Christian thinking.

While scholars universally attribute to Paul the letter to the Romans, technically he did not write it. He authored it, but it was actually written by Tertius (Rom. 16:22). Most of the writings of that era were created in one of two ways. Either they were dictated to a scribe, or the author told the scribe what he wanted to say, let the scribe put it into words, and then approved or edited it. Tertius was Paul's scribe for this letter.³ Notwithstanding, since Paul authored the letter, it is not incorrect to speak as if he had written it, even though he did not do so with his own hand.

When Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, he had never been to Rome. Unlike places like Ephesus and Galatia, he had not planted the Church in Rome. No one knows how it started, but since Rome was the hub of the known world, it was constantly full of international travelers. Undoubtedly Christianity was brought there very

² The most famous of these disagreements was over whether one must be circumcised and accept the Jewish Law before becoming a Christian. Paul and Peter were at opposite poles on this issue (Gal. 2:11), but eventually God revealed to Peter in a vision that Paul was right (Acts 10:9ff).

³ In Gal. 6:11 Paul indicates that he wrote at least a portion of that letter with his own hand.

¹ When Hebrews was originally included in the Bible it was believed that Paul had written it, but by the early Middle Ages scholars universally rejected his authorship. There is no doubt, however, that a disciple of Paul wrote it, and that it is consistent with his teaching.

early, probably first by Jews who accepted Christ's teachings before the followers of "The Way"¹ had been rejected by most Jews.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians or the Philippians, they knew who he was and what his credentials were. The people in Asia and Eastern Europe knew him by reputation even if they did not know him personally. Since his letters were widely circulated and shared from city to city, he was well known. In Rome, however, this was not true. While there were probably some there who had heard of him, he was essentially a stranger to them. It was necessary, therefore, for him to establish his authority. He did this in effect by saying, "Here is what I believe, and from it you can see that I have the spiritual authority to function as a leader among you."

Paul was at a turning point in his career. He had planted and supported churches all over western Asia and eastern Europe, and he now hoped to fulfill a long held dream. He wanted to start preaching in Spain, one of the most important provinces of the Roman Empire. He had gathered a considerable amount of money to aid the struggling Christians in Jerusalem, and he was headed there to deliver it. The Church in Rome was apparently prosperous, and he wrote the Romans to ask for their assistance in raising the money to fund his mission to

Spain (Ch. 15). He sent Phoebe, a Corinthian lady who was one of his financial supporters, to help raise the money (16:1-2).²

When thinking of Paul's letters it is common to think of there being a church in Corinth, one in Philippi, one in Thessalonica, one in Rome, etc. In fact each of these places had many churches. These churches were small gatherings of people who met in members' homes. Sunday was a workday in ancient Rome. Workdays began at sunup, so the Christians would gather well before sunrise at the home of one of their members (usually a richer one whose house was large enough to accommodate such a gathering).³ Often these churches had a specific identity. One might be made up of converted Jews, another of converted Gentile pagans, another of the clients of the host, and so on.

There seems to have been a division in Rome between Christians who were converted Jews, and those who were Gentiles. This was logical for many reasons. Jews would not associate with Gentiles socially, and under no circumstances would they eat with them. If a Gentile so much as touched a Jew's cooking or eating vessel it

² Despite false accusations that Paul was a misogynist, he had a number of female assistants, including Phoebe (Rom. 16:1), Lydia (Acts 16:14) and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3).

³ It is a myth that they worshiped in the catacombs. The catacombs were subterranean tombs that were dark and cramped, and that stank from the decaying corpses buried there. There were funeral rites in the catacombs, but regular worship did not take place there.

¹ Christianity was originally a sect of Judaism known as "The Way." It was in Antioch that its followers, now rejected by traditional Jews, were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

became ceremonially unclean and had to be purified by a complicated ritual. This became a problem when it came to the Eucharist. In time this was overcome, but in the very early Church, when many Christians considered themselves to be simply a Jewish sect, it was a serious problem. Some scholars believe that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans to deal with this division, just as he had written to the other churches to address their problems. Most scholars, however, believe that Paul addressed this division simply as an aspect of the diversity of Christians (Ch. 14), and not as a serious problem in the Church in Rome. Rather, he expected to visit Rome on his way to Spain (and to pick up the money Phoebe had collected). If he could spend some time in Rome and get to know the Christians there, he might well have made important contacts that could help him in his work in Spain.

It is clear that one of Paul's main purposes in writing such a comprehensive theological document was to present to the Christians in Rome what he believed, and what they should believe and practice. The letter was not intended to correct their errors (such as we find in 1 Thessalonians), but rather to persuade them. One of the problems with such a cosmopolitan center as Rome was that every error, misinterpretation and outright heresy that might be dreamed up anywhere in the world would eventually find its way there. If these false teachings were allowed to prosper, they would also be disseminated from

Rome. Paul wanted to ensure that the Church in Rome would be orthodox in its teachings and practices, and thus wanted to explain to them what these should be.

Paul's dream of visiting Rome on his way to Spain was not to be fulfilled, but he did not know that at the time he wrote the letter to the Romans. The Jews in Judea and its environs, who saw the Christians' teachings as heretical and blasphemous, were rejecting them, sometimes violently. In a fracas in Jerusalem between Christians and Jews, Paul was arrested. The Romans did not take kindly to anyone who caused civil unrest, and Paul was accused of doing so. He remained under arrest in Judea for a very long time.¹ Thinking that he could get a fairer trial in Rome, he invoked his right as a Roman citizen to be tried by the emperor. This turned out to be disastrous for him.

The emperor was Nero (r. 54-68 AD), who in his early years ruled reasonably well. There was no reason for Paul not to expect a fair trial from him. About the time that Paul appealed for trial, Nero murdered his mother and wife, and exiled his teacher Seneca, all of whom had kept him very well under control. When they were out of his life, he entered into the period of violence and madness

¹ While this limited him severely, it was not as onerous as it sounds. His arrest would have been more-or-less a house arrest, and did not involve confinement in a prison. He was still able to write and preach, and to a limited degree to move about the city.

for which he is best remembered today. Shortly thereafter Rome burned. Whether or not Nero was actually to blame for the fire, the people accused him of it. To divert the blame he accused the Roman Christians of starting the fire. He then began one of the most brutal of the many persecutions that Christians for the next two centuries would suffer under the Romans.¹ Paul would eventually die in Rome under Nero's persecution.

In the Middle Ages, scholars looked on Romans as a comprehensive theological document—something of a mini-*Summa*—that laid out a systematic theology for Christianity. This was obviously not Paul's intent, since it did not address many of his favorite theological themes that he addressed, for example, in his letters to the Corinthians and the Galatians. Among others, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas identified Chapters 1-8 as dealing with theology, and Chapters 9-16 as dealing with ethics. This is a typical neat analysis that one might expect from the mediaeval Scholastics, but it does not hold up very well under modern exegesis.

¹ This was not actually a religious persecution. The Romans looked on the Christians much as Americans looked on the "Moonies" in the 1960s. They saw them as a weird cult with strange and inscrutable beliefs, and they wanted nothing to do with them. When Nero needed a scapegoat, the Christians were the obvious choice. He did not choose them because of their religious beliefs (which couldn't have interested him less), but simply because they were convenient social outcasts. Domitian (r. 81-96 AD) was the first emperor to persecute the Christians for what they believed.

While Romans is a powerful theological document, it does not qualify as a textbook of systematic theology.

The Protestant reformers took quite the opposite stance, being almost willing to discard parts of Romans. Martin Luther was nearly obsessed with the concept of justification by faith, to the point that he believed it to be the only means of salvation. He focused intensely on Chapters 1-8, which deal with justification, and said that Chapters 9-16 were hardly worth reading. They deal with the relations between Jews and Gentiles, and since Luther was strongly anti-Jewish he had little interest in them.² He also chose to do some rather extensive editing on the Bible, eliminating several Old Testament books because he thought them worthless or disagreed with their teaching.³ This shortened version produced what today is known as the Protestant Bible. John Calvin, on the other hand, focused on Chapters 9-11 and considered the rest of the epistle unimportant. These chapters deal with Paul's teaching on predestination. The problem is that while Calvin believed in the predestination of individuals, Paul's teaching is clearly of the justifi-

² Luther was anti-Jewish, not anti-Semitic. To be anti-Jewish means to be opposed to the teachings of Judaism on theological grounds. To be anti-Semitic is to hate Jews simply because they are Jews. Luther, like the majority of Europeans of his time, was somewhat anti-Semitic, but not obsessively so.

³ He also wanted to discard the Epistle of James because he disagreed with its teaching of salvation by works. Under pressure from his followers, however, he grudgingly included it.

cation of nations (i.e. moral and spiritual groups such as Jews and Gentiles, not political nations). He taught that being predestined to salvation means having the possibility of salvation opened up to us, not being guaranteed automatic entry into heaven. Calvin believed that God has selected some to go to heaven, and they will do so regardless of what they do; others are selected to go to hell, and they will do so no matter how good they are. The “catch-22” is that the saved will be unable to do any significant evil, and the damned will be unable to do any significant good. This is in direct contradiction to the idea that God gave us free will, which is the freedom to do as we please and to choose whether or not to obey him.¹ Paul was a strong believer in free will.

A common misreading by moralists today is their emphasis on Paul's condemnation of homosexuality in Chapter 1. Paul never focused on any specific sin in Romans or in any of his other letters. His several lists of sins are not intended to identify particular sins that he feels are most important, but simply to give examples of the types of sins that destroy people's relationship with God. To Paul, sin is not simply a moral lapse. Rather, it is an act of disobedience and rebellion against God, rooted in the pride of thinking that we can do what we want without accountability to him. No matter how much we may do lip ser-

vice to loving God, if we consciously and willingly do something that we know is offensive to him, this is rebellion. To Paul, anything that damages our relationship to God is sinful, and all sins are equal in his sight. Being just a little bit sinful is like being just a little bit pregnant. Either you are sinful or you are not, and if so you must address your sins and seek fervently to repent and be forgiven.

To Paul, the essence of our relationship to God is faith. The word he uses is *pistis* (πίστις), which involves considerably more than just belief, although belief is a significant part of it. *Pistis* includes trust, loyalty, fidelity and reliance. In classic Greek the honoring of an oath or obligation would be considered *pistis*. In his humanity, Jesus of Nazareth's faith in the Father (*pistis Christou*, the Faith of Christ) is what justified (saved) all mankind. Our faith *in* Christ is an essential part of our relationship with God, but it was the faith *of* Christ, his faith in the Father, that brings us salvation. Being saved does not mean automatically going to heaven when we die. Being saved means that it is now possible, through the faith of Christ, for us to establish a relationship with God that will enable us to go to heaven. Christ opened the door, but it is up to us to change our lives and make the effort to pass through that door. To Paul, then, faith is more than just a gift that we can passively receive. It is an act of conscious will through which we choose to establish a relationship with God.

Richard R. Losch+

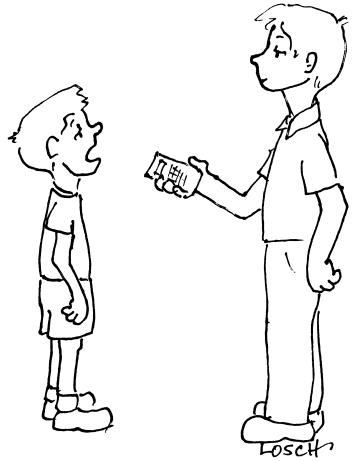
¹ St. Augustine said, “Love God and do as you please.” The idea, of course, is that if we truly love God then it would never please us to do anything that is displeasing to him.

Don't Forget
INTERFAITH
MEN'S
BREAKFAST
FEBRUARY 1
7:45 A.M.
Mark your Calendar

HARDEE'S
WASHINGTON STREET

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



*"I don't need a pocket calculator.
I already know how many
pockets I have."*



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