

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
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March 20

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month, in recognition of the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25), is *Annunciation* by Orazio Gentileschi. Completed in 1623 in Genoa, it is oil on canvas, and measures 9'4"x6'5". It is displayed in the Galleria Sabauda in Turin, Italy. The painting depicts the Angel Gabriel visiting the Virgin Mary to announce to her that she had been chosen to bear the incarnate Son of God (Luke 1:26ff). The heavy red curtains indicate that Gentileschi was influenced by Caravaggio's *Annunciation* which he had seen in Rome, although he uses much warmer daylight rather than Caravaggio's nighttime scene. In reality Mary was a peasant girl in her early teens, and would have been dressed in simple homespun, most likely of earth tone. Nonetheless, most Renaissance paintings depict her as a beautiful young woman dressed in a fine gown, usually of blue. It is also significant that while Mary is in a position of humility in this painting, with the angel kneeling before her, in most paintings she is kneeling in fear before the angel. Gentileschi sent the painting as a gift to the Duke of Savoy, accompanied by a letter applying for a position as a court artist. The duke kept the painting, but did not give Gentileschi the appointment, leading him to move to Paris the next year.

Orazio Lomi Gentileschi (1563–1639) was born in Tuscany, the son of a Florentine goldsmith named Giovanni Lomi. He took the name Gentileschi from an uncle with whom he lived after moving to Rome as a young student. While he spent the greater part of his life in Rome, the offer of lucrative commissions led him to move to Genoa in 1621 at the age of 58. It was there that he completed this painting. In 1624 he moved to the court of Marie de Medici in Paris, where he stayed for two

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years. In 1626 he moved with his three sons to England, where he stayed for the rest of his life at the court of King Charles I. He died in London in 1639 at the age of 75, three years before the beginning of Oliver Cromwell's Puritan rebellion.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

A Baptist pastor friend of mine wisely observed recently that no matter how magnificent a church building may be, without God it is nothing more than just another pretty building. Conversely, no matter how plain and simple it may be, if God is faithfully worshiped there, it is a place of magnificent glory. All too often we allow our churches to fade from the worship of God, and to become meeting halls focused on worldly matters such as social justice, racial equity, political integrity, ecological concerns and the like. While these are worthy and important matters and are generally consistent with the teachings of the Gospel, they are not what the Church is all about. Jesus Christ gave us the Church, the Body of Christ, for one purpose and one purpose only—to unite us with God and set us on the right path in order that we can keep out of Hell and get into Heaven. Period. That's it. When we get that right, all the good service to mankind and to the world will follow as the day follows the night. As Saint James tells us, faith without good works is empty, but good works cannot substitute for faith. Our good works will not lead us to the Altar, but if we are at the Altar striving to come to God, the good works will follow naturally. Martin Luther King, Jr. made it very clear that he fought for civil rights because he was a Christian, he was not a Christian because he fought for civil rights. It is only through prayer, the sacraments, and focusing on the things not of this world that we can have any significant effect on the things of this world. God must come first. My friend asked a question that we all need to consider very carefully: "When is the last time you invited God to your time of worship?"

Father Rick Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

Muscle

For all their peculiarities, the ancient Romans and Greeks had a sense of humor. They thought that many of the visible muscles, such as the biceps, pectorals and abdominals, resembled rats moving underneath the skin. The Romans called them *musculi*, little rats, a diminutive of *mus*, rat. In Latin *mus* means both rat and mouse. The Romans normally did not distinguish between the two. We get our word mouse from the Old German *Maus*, which derives from the Latin *mus*. The Greeks also called them *myes* (μύες), rats. They were not the only ones. In Middle German *Maus* means either mouse or muscle, and the Arabic *'adal*, field mouse, and *'adalah*, muscle, are obviously related. In Cornish, *logodenfer*, which means calf of the leg, is literally rat of the leg. The next time you see the rippling muscles of a body-builder on TV, think of rats running around under his skin. You might feel better about being so out-of-shape.

The word muscle came into English as a noun directly from the French *muscle*, which is from the Latin *musculus* (little rat). That is also, of course, the source of our words muscular, muscularity and musculature. Muscle was first used as a slang verb in English (as to muscle in on a conversation) in 1913, and had become a common part of American slang by 1922.

Richard R. Losch+

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, 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+

The biggest troublemaker you will probably ever have to deal with is the one who watches you from the mirror every morning.

Achoo – God Bless You

You may wonder about the origin of the almost automatic response of “God bless you” when someone sneezes. Some say that when we sneeze we are at our weakest, so a demon could enter us then. There is no historic evidence to substantiate this explanation. The custom goes back to ancient pagan times, and was adopted by Christians in their very earliest days. It was even officially approved by the Pope.

Ancient people knew nothing about bacteria. They had no idea of the cause of disease, and most believed that it was either divine punishment for one’s own sins or those of his ancestors, or the action of malicious spirits. We tend to associate the Bubonic Plague with medieval times, but in fact it goes back to the dawn of history, and was one of the most dreaded of all diseases. A very early symptom of the plague is sneezing,¹ and when someone sneezed those around him would call for a blessing of the gods to stop any further development of it. Even in the primitive Germanic tribes, when someone would sneeze, the response was *Gesundheit* (“health,” literally “soundness”).² In AD 77 the Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder questioned the effectiveness of “saluting” someone when he sneezed, and in AD 150 Apuleius in *The Golden Ass* referred to blessing a sneezer. On February 16, 600, Pope Gregory I, in an effort to ward off the plague, issued an edict approving and encouraging the response of “God bless you” (“*Deus benedicat tibi*”) to any sneezer, to be said by all within hearing of the sneeze.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ A famous children’s game refers to the Bubonic Plague: “Ring around the rosie, a pocketful of posies, achoo, achoo, all fall down.” Sneezing is the first sign of the disease, then roseate rings develop around the lymph nodes in the armpits and groin, followed by large painful black swelling of the nodes, and then an agonizing death. The pocketful of posies refers to the bags of herbs that people carried to ward off the disease. The swellings were called buboes, thus the name of the disease, Bubonic Plague.

² To this day the sneezer’s proper response to “*Gesundheit*” is the ancient, “*Sie ist besser als Krankheit*,” “It is better than sickness.”

We and They

Since the dawn of humanity, as far back as when *Homo Sapiens* was only one of many human species co-inhabiting the earth, humans have noted differences among themselves and divided into two groups: We (those who are like us) and They (those who differ). Throughout history the name of almost every ancient people and tribe on every continent means either “The Humans” or “The People,” and all others are just “The Others.” For example, the Dinka people of the southern Sudan call themselves the Jieng, which means “the People.” Their fiercest enemies are the Nuer, which in their language means “the Humans.” In eastern Siberia and northern Alaska lives the Upik tribe. Their name, like that of hundreds of tribes worldwide, also means “the People.” All who are not a member of your tribe are “the Others.” Paleontological evidence indicates that since the earliest stages of human development, the Others were seen as a subhuman threat to be either avoided or killed.

It is hypothesized that one of the reasons *Homo Sapiens* ended up being the only surviving human species is that we were more willing than the rest to accept at least a few differences. This enabled us to gather into larger tribes and communities, affording better protection and mutual support.

As civilization has developed over tens of millennia, it has been moving more and more toward a global civilization. As recently as 500 years ago the world was made up of hundreds of independent states, from little city-states to great empires, that could survive on their own with little or no dependence on others. Today that is impossible. There is no place on earth, with the possible exception of one or two as yet undiscovered tribes in the Amazon Valley, that is not affected by global politics and the global economy. Nonetheless we still have a very long way to go before global unity can be successfully realized. It seems that our species is “hard-wired” to maintain a we-and-they mentality. Experts disagree as to whether or not this is a survival mechanism left over from our primitive origins, but they agree that it is nonetheless so. Whoever “we” might be, it

is in our very nature not to like or trust “them.”

As we survey history, it is interesting to note that there have been only two great empires that seem to have overcome this, at least to some degree. For the most part, throughout history when kingdoms expanded into empires, they tended to treat their vassals as “they,” even when they had successfully absorbed them into their own culture. In most cases this resulted in the ultimate collapse of the empire. There were two striking exceptions. One was the Qin (Chin) Dynasty in east Asia under its founder, Qin Shi Huang. He united many small groups into one nation that would eventually become China. The other was the Persian empire under Cyrus the Great. Both empires, when they conquered a smaller state, absorbed it into their culture and treated it as if it were a full and equal part of the empire. A classic example of the failure to do that in recent history is the British Empire, the largest empire in history. That failure led to its eventual collapse. Britain treated her colonies and possessions as inferiors, patronizing them as if she were their benevolent protector, yet making it clear that they were not her equals. At the end of the 19th century a British citizen boarded a train in South Africa with a first-class ticket. He was a highly educated and distinguished barrister who had graduated from a London law school with the highest honors. He was physically thrown off the train because he refused to go to the third-class car where “colored” people were required to ride. Soon thereafter Mohandas K. Gandhi returned to his native India and spearheaded the movement that led to Indian independence and ultimately to the breakup of the British Empire. He was “they,” and was thus unacceptable to the ruling British “we.” America was not innocent of this, either. When the United States captured the Philippines from Spain in 1898, William Howard Taft said that “our little brown brothers” would need fifty to a hundred years of close supervision “to develop anything resembling Anglo-Saxon political principles and skills.”

Drawing a distinction between “us” and “them” seems to be basic to human nature. One of the great blessings of God,

however, is that he enables us to transcend human nature and to rise above our more basic human tendencies. It is basic to human nature to focus on ourselves, put ourselves before others, grab what we want when we can do so, and as some wit put it, “do unto others before they do unto you.” Doing what comes naturally, despite the popular song, is often not at all the most desirable course of action. Many religions, most notably Judaism, have laid the groundwork for rising above our nature. Notwithstanding, the teachings of Jesus Christ and his atoning death and resurrection have not only given us the means to do so, but they also lay a mandate on us to do so. As Christians, it is our duty to work toward the unification of mankind, and to abolish our “we and they” mentality. As I look at the world around us, I fear that we are doing a very poor job of it.

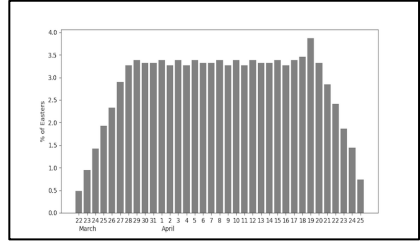
Differences are good. I can think of no more boring and unproductive world than one in which everyone looks, thinks and behaves the same. Differences force us to observe, think, and often compete, and competition frequently leads to innovation and improvement. Differences also mean that not everyone is equal on every level. There will always be some who exceed others in intelligence, strength, wisdom, energy, looks, talents, and so on and on. This means that distinctions have to be drawn and recognized. It also means that sometimes exclusions must be made, but it does not justify excluding or oppressing anyone, either individuals or groups, simply because they are different. Those who are different can also sometimes be dangerous. Be careful, though—they are not dangerous because they are different, they are different because they are dangerous.

We live these days in a very divided society that often focuses more on what divides us than on what we have in common. That is human nature, which from the beginning has been one of “we and they.” As Christians, however, we are obligated not to do what is natural, but what is supernatural—to work and pray to achieve what Jesus prayed to his Father on the night he was betrayed, “that they may be one, even as we are one.”

Richard R. Losch+

Easter Date Distribution

It may seem to you that Easter is unusually late this year (April 17), but the date is actually quite normal. The date of Easter is determined by the lunar calendar, and can fall only from March 22 through April 25. This information might seem a bit arcane to many of our readers, but anyone who loves statistics should find it quite interesting. The distribution is the percentage of times a particular date occurs during one full cycle. It is a very long cycle, repeating only every 5.7 million years. One might expect the distribution to be a normal (bell-shaped) curve, but instead it rises sharply (March 22-27), plateaus (March 28-April 20), and then drops sharply (April 21-25), forming a curve that is made up of three almost straight lines. For some reason April 19 jumps about 0.5% in frequency above the other dates in the plateau.¹ We knew you would enjoy Easter more knowing this.



Richard R. Losch+

Hasidic Wisdom

The legendary Hasidic Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1809) once prayed, “Lord of the Universe, I want to propose a deal. We have many sins. You have much forgiveness. Let us exchange our sins for your forgiveness. And if you should say that this is not a fair exchange, then my reply is, if we had no sins, what would you do with all your forgiveness?”

(Thanks to Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg).

Richard R. Losch+

Anger is the punishment we give ourselves for the mistakes of others.

¹ People with a conspiracy theory mentality love this. April 19 was the day of the first shot of the American Revolution (“the shot heard around the world”), and April 20, after which the distribution drops precipitously, was Hitler’s birthday.

Let Slip the Dogs of War

In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Marc Antony shouts, "Cry 'Havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war" (III.i.273). Most simply deem this another of Shakespeare's colorful metaphors, but he knew his Roman history. One of the most fearsome soldiers in the Roman legions was not a human, but the *Canis Pugnax* (pl. *Canes Pugnaces*), the Pugnacious Dog, a.k.a. *Canis Corso*. They had hundreds of them, and to the enemy they were often more frightening than the best human warriors. Although the breed is now extinct, they were bred for size and strength. They were huge dogs, considerably larger than their direct descendant, the Neapolitan Mastiff. A full-sized *Canis Pugnax* had a bite of 710 lb/in², which is 50 lb/in² more than an adult African lion. As with most extremely large dogs they were very short-lived, averaging about six years. Like modern Mastiffs, they were gentle by nature, but were easily trained to be fierce and quite deadly fighters. The practice of cropping dogs' tails and ears began with the *Canis Pugnax* so that no one could grab and hold them by these appendages. In time people came to like that look, and did it to other breeds even when it had no practical purpose. The dogs were trained and led into battle by a special group of legionnaires called *Auxilia*. As with modern law-enforcement and military dogs, there was a strong bond between the *Canes Pugnaces* and their human handlers.



The dogs were used in battle in a number of ways. When the army was on the move, two or three dogs led the way and others occasionally flanked the march to smell out and detect enemies waiting in ambush. Sometimes they were released in large packs that could contain as many as a hundred dogs. In spite of their size and bulk they were very fast runners, and in a short sprint they could outrun a warhorse. A small pack of them could easily overcome a horse, and a large pack could even bring down an elephant. More than once when the enemy

soldiers saw a huge pack of snarling *Canes Pugnaces* in spiked body armor coming at them full speed, they just dropped their weapons and fled. The most famous use of them was in 231 BC on the island of Sardinia. In a revolt, Rome had lost control of the island. They invaded with an army made up of mostly dogs, and quickly defeated and killed the rebels and regained control. From that time on they ruled over Sardinia with an occupying force in which dogs outnumbered the humans. The dogs were also used as incendiaries. They would tie pots of flaming oil on their backs and send them into enemy encampments and villages. Most ancient peoples believed that animals could not feel pain, so even though it makes us cringe, this did not bother even the dogs' handlers all that much.¹

The dogs were black, and despite their size they could move around at night without being seen or heard, so they made excellent guard dogs. Woe betide any stranger who tried to sneak around outside a Roman military encampment at night. If he were lucky the dogs would bark in time for him to be captured, but more often he would simply be torn to pieces. *Canes Pugnaces* were also used to guard the villas of the rich. The slave who was the dog's handler would release him after everyone was in his quarters for the night, and any stranger who broke in would not come out alive. Many villas had a mosaic at the entrance that said, "*Cave Canem*," Beware the Dog.

The *Canes Pugnaces* were also used for a gruesome but typically Roman form of entertainment. The Roman "Games" (*Ludi*) were not like a modern football or baseball game that lasts for a couple of hours and is over. They began about an hour after sunrise and lasted until sunset, and sometimes they would go on for several days in a row—even weeks on very special occasions. They also consisted of much more than just a few gladiatorial fights. The first events of the day were usually

¹ As hard as it is for us to imagine, this ignorance pervaded most cultures right into relatively modern times. Bear-baiting, dog-fighting and cock-fighting were popular "sports" well into the 20th century, and although now illegal, they are still practiced today in many parts of our country.

animal fights, where exotic wild animals imported from all over the world would be pitted against each other. Literally thousands of animals were killed in these spectacles, driving some African and Indian species to extinction. Often the war dogs were used in these combats. One of the favorite events of the day usually took place around noon, and that was the public execution of criminals. These were bloody and torturous executions. One of the favorites was to give the criminal a knife, club or sword and then turn a vicious animal loose on him. A particular favorite was to turn a vicious animal on him, often a *Canis Pugnax*. If the condemned killed the animal he was freed, but that rarely happened. He was usually badly clawed or chewed up before he was finally killed and torn to pieces. This spectacle was second in popularity only to the gladiatorial contests that took place later in the afternoon.

As the Roman Empire faded, so did the *Canis Pugnax*. No one knows exactly when, but the breed eventually became extinct sometime in Late Antiquity.¹ It did leave many descendants, however, the most notable being the Neapolitan Mastiff.

Richard R. Losch+

The Trouble with Translation

As I have frequently reminded our readers, studying a work that is translated from another language is fraught with the danger of missing the subtle but often very important nuances of the original words used. This is particularly true regarding study of the Bible, because both the Hebrew and Greek languages are rich with idioms and word plays that convey an entirely different meaning from what they literally say. The same is often true with English. For example, take the expression “to

¹ Late Antiquity is what used to be called the Dark Ages. That latter expression is inaccurate because they were not at all dark as historians use that term. Although the masses were ignorant and often barbarian, we know a great deal about the period, including that in many respects it was not at all uncivilized or ignorant. It was just a period of cultural transition.

bark up the wrong tree.” Translated into almost any other language, this makes no sense. A foreign translator trying to render this into his own language, unless he were expert with English idioms, might even think that “bark” referred to the tree’s outer layer. Even in England, where they speak more or less the same language as in America,¹ 90% of the people would have no idea what that means. That idiom is not used in England. When John F. Kennedy said, “I am a Berliner” to assure the West German people that he supported them, he said, “Ich bin ein Berliner” when he should have said, “Ich bin Berliner.” The difference is subtle and is meaningless to an American, but to a German, “Ich bin Berliner” means “I am a Berliner [from Berlin], while “Ich bin ein Berliner means “I am a jelly donut.” Fortunately the Germans, unlike the French, are very tolerant of grammatical mistakes made by foreigners.

Another type of challenge is translating works like Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. They are written in a strict, complex poetic style that leaves the translator with only two options. He can either translate the meaning accurately and abandon the poetic structure, or retain the structure and only approximate the meaning. Either way, much is lost from the original. It is the same with the Psalms, most of which were written as songs. Their subtle meanings depend not only on their poetic structure, but also on their music (all of which is now lost).

Translating from Hebrew, both classic and modern, is a special challenge. Hebrew is rich with idioms, many of which depend on word plays such as alliteration and assonance. Without these, the subtle nuances of the idiom are lost, and thus so is much of its meaning. It would be like trying to translate Dr. Seuss’s *Fox in Socks* into Spanish. *Zorro en Calcetines* somehow fails to carry the spirit of the original.

¹ Winston Churchill observed that the British and the Americans are two peoples separated by a common language. A Brit might say, “I lowered the bonnet and put my spanners and Wellies in the boot before I motored to the rounders pitch,” while a Yank would say, “I closed the hood and put my wrenches and boots in the trunk before I drove to the baseball field.”

Saint Jerome (AD 347-420) was a brilliant scholar. He spoke Latin as his native tongue, and like every well-educated Roman, he was fluent in Greek. He did not know Hebrew, however. When he felt that God had called him to translate the Bible into Latin, he was unwilling to settle for translating the Old Testament from the Septuagint, its ancient Greek translation. He moved to Jerusalem and studied Hebrew for years with several rabbis there. He mastered the language, and rendered a magnificent Latin translation of the Old Testament.¹ He acknowledged, however, that there were many subtleties in the Hebrew idioms that simply could not be carried over onto Latin and were thus lost. The first English translations of the Bible, those of John Wycliffe (1330-1384) and Miles Coverdale (1488-1569), were translated from Jerome's Latin translation. Thus a second level of subtle meanings was lost.

The King James Version of the Bible (1611), along with the 1549 Book of Common Prayer and the works of Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, had more influence on the development of the English Language than any other writings in its history. Much of the KJV, however, is not a translation from the original Hebrew and Greek, but a correction and "punching up" of earlier translations, including those of Wycliffe and Coverdale. Since those were both English translations from Saint Jerome's Latin translation of the original Hebrew and Greek, however, two levels of unavoidable imprecision have been injected into the text. In addition, while the KJV was a magnificent piece of scholarship for its time, its time was 400 years ago.² They worked with the best manuscripts available in the 17th century, but since that time much earlier and thus more accurate copies of the Hebrew and Greek texts have been

¹ That translation, which includes his translation of the New Testament from its original Greek, is known as the Vulgate. It is still used in the Roman Catholic Church as the authoritative Latin version of the Bible.

² The KJV was put together by a team of Anglican, Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars who cooperated to avoid bias. It is said that it is the only great work of literature in history that was created by a committee.

discovered. Since all of the original manuscripts are lost, we have to rely on copies. Over time many mistakes were made in copying the documents, and sometimes intentional changes were made.¹ Therefore the earlier the documents are, the more likely they are to be true to the now lost originals.

All of this is not to say that the Bible should not be studied in translation. To the contrary, as long as the translation is generally acknowledged to be a good one, it should indeed be studied. What this does mean, however, is that we must be careful to remember that we should never try to establish important doctrine or declare as incontrovertible truth something that is based on a translated passage. That can be done only by those recognized by the Church as experts, and then only in conference after long prayer, meditation, mutual discussion and agreement. The truth shall set you free (John 8:32), but only when you can be sure that it really is the truth.

Richard R. Losch+

Amen, Not -30-

“Back when,” when a journalist finished an article and it was ready to be submitted to the editor, his last line was “-30-.” This indicated that this was the end of the article or story. All too often we end our prayers with an “Amen” as if it had the same meaning, like saying, “OK, God, I’m done now.” Amen is a Hebrew word (אמן) meaning “truly,” and anciently it was adopted into Greek (ἀμην) with the same meaning. While it literally means “truly” in both languages, in English it is usually interpreted to mean “So be it” or “May it be so.”

Richard R. Losch+

¹ These interpolations were not meant to be malicious or deceitful, but were made because the scribe was trying to make the meaning clearer. In ancient times this was not deemed to be as wrong as we would deem it to be today. For example, scholars have no doubt that the phrase “where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched” (Mark 9:46, 48) is a much later interpolation, and was not in Mark’s original gospel.

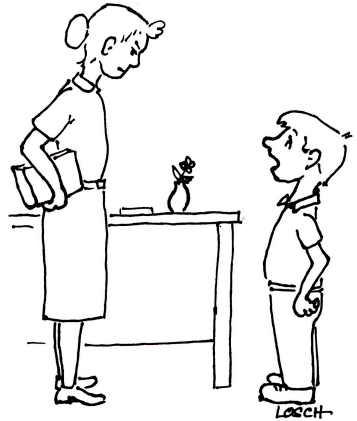
A Touch of Trivia

In 1974 Peter Benchley published *Jaws*. It was such a success that Stephen Spielberg bought the film rights, and it was the first film in history to gross over \$100 million. It engendered such a fear of sharks that Benchley became a conservation activist to get the public to understand their true nature. The film also dealt a serious blow to sea-side vacation resorts for almost two years. It even hurt seafood restaurants, who advertised, "Get even with the sharks – eat fish!"

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



*"My problem is that you
keep asking me what
my problem is."*



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