

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



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June 2017

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is Titian's *Pentecost*, completed in 1545. It is oil on canvas, in the "Mannerism" style of the High Renaissance. I have not been able to find its dimensions, but for Titian this type of painting was generally about 9'x6'. It is displayed in the church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, Italy. It depicts the descent of the Holy Spirit on Christ's disciples as recounted in Acts 2:1-4. At the center is the Blessed Virgin, and behind her are Mary Magdalene and Joanna, the primary financial supporters of Jesus' ministry (Lk. 8:3). Surrounding them are the twelve Apostles, including Matthias, who had been elected to replace Judas (Acts 1:26). The Holy Spirit is descending on them in the form of a dove, and tongues of fire appear over their heads.

Tiziano Vicelli, commonly known in English as Titian, was born about 1488 in Pieve de Cadore in the Republic of Venice, and was thus often called Tiziano da Cadore. He was recognized by his contemporaries as one of the greatest painters of his time, and was often called by Dante's beautiful line from *Paradiso*, "the sun among small stars." Titian was best noted for his imaginative and ingenious use of color. His later works are not as vivid as the earlier ones, but throughout his life he thought "outside the box" in his use of color. Rather than earning the criticism of his contemporaries, however, they honored him by their attempts to emulate him. In his later years he painted a number of works of nature, and in them he is particularly noted for his innovative brushwork.

Titian died of a fever in 1576 at a time that the Black Plague was ravaging Italy. He left a huge number of paintings, most of which have survived.

Richard R. Losch+

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A Word From the Editor

May people's concept of a perfect marriage is one in which the man finds a woman who will completely satisfy his needs and wishes, and she finds that he will do the same for her. While it sounds like a marriage made in heaven, I submit that it is headed for disaster. Such a union is based on selfishness, not on true love. Rabbi Abraham Twerski calls this "fish love." A man says that he loves fish, so he kills the fish and eats it. This is not love. What the man loves is not the fish, but what the fish can do for him. A man may lust after a woman because she can fulfill his needs, but if he truly loves her he has no thought of his own need. He focuses on fulfilling hers. When Jesus said that it is better to give than to receive, he was not talking about money, but about love.

So it is with our relationship with God. God has no needs that are not fulfilled within himself through the Holy Trinity. He did not create us because he needs us, or even because he needs to create, he created us because he is love, and love is giving. He created us and loves us not for what we can do for him, but for what he can do for us. And that love is so boundless that he even took upon himself our humanity and suffered and died for us despite our unworthiness, simply because we needed salvation and he fulfilled that need out of love for us. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Sad to say, our love for God is often fish love. We "love" and serve him with an eye on what he can do for us ("I don't go to church because I don't get anything out of it"). God has no needs, so our focus cannot be on fulfilling his needs. He does have a deep desire that arises out of his love, however, and that is that we love him in return. Because he loves us he does not force us to love him (that would be slavery, not love), and thus we are free to take him for granted or even to reject and hate him. Love God. That is all he asks of us.

Father Rick Losch

Be Wordly Wise

In the Pink

When we hear the word pink the first thing that comes to mind is the color between red and white, but the word actually has many meanings. In Middle English the word was *penk*, and it meant either a young salmon (which is pink in color) or the color pink. It also became the name of a number of different flowers (which one depends on the region) because of their color. It originated from the Middle German *Pinke*, a pinkish minnow. In modern German it also means both the color pink and a slim shore boat (so called because it is shaped like a minnow).¹ In Britain and in some regions of America a pink is also a slim boat.

Pink as a noun means perfection. A good pink complexion is considered a sign of health, and in 16th century London there appeared the expression to be “in the pink of health.” Shakespeare referred to “the very pink of courtesy” (*Romeo* 2:4:25). Today to say that something is in the pink means that it is in the best of condition.

The color pink is particularly popular with women, and is often associated with baby girls (as blue is for boys). Because of this it is often used as an adjective meaning homosexual, as in “the pink lobby” or “the pink economy.” Lively and Szaz wrote *The Pink Swastika* about homosexuality in Nazism.

Pink is also used as a derogatory adjective meaning far left-wing politically. This usage comes from the Communist red flag, implying that someone is not actually a Communist (red), but leans in that direction.

As a verb, to pink means either to pierce or to cut a scalloped edge (as with pinking shears). This usage derives from the Old French *pinque*, a sharp supporting stake.

Finally, appropriate for this season, an offshoot of pink is Pinxter or Pinkster. This is used mainly around New York, and means Pentecost. It is believed to have come from the

¹ In German it is also a slang term for money, probably because some German banknotes were pinkish in color.

pinxter flower, a pink rhododendron that blooms in in the spring. This is rather circular, because the flower's name comes from the Dutch for Pentecost, which is *Pinksteren*. It is not clear whether the name *Pinksteren* derived from the spring flower, or vice versa.

Richard R. Losch+

Parish Directory Update

We will be updating the Parish Directory during June and will publish the updated Directory by July 1, 2017. Copies are available on the table in the Parish House. Please review the Parish Directory for any errors and/or omissions and give any additions or corrections in writing to Hiram Patrenos or e-mail them to him at patrenoj@bellsouth.net.

Hiram Patrenos

Bishop Sloan to Visit

The Right Reverend John McKee Sloan, Bishop of Alabama, will visit St. James' on Sunday, June 18th and will be the celebrant at Holy Communion and Confirmation, which will begin at 11:00 a.m. A catered parish luncheon will follow the service. St. Alban's will not have a service on this day and all who attend there are invited to St. James'. So that we may plan accurately, if you plan to attend the luncheon, you are asked to sign up on the sheet on the bulletin board in the vestibule/narthex or contact Hiram Patrenos (205-499-0506 or patrenoj@bellsouth.net) no later than Sunday, June 11th.

Hiram Patrenos

DHR Food Bank

St. James' is responsible for supplying the Department of Human Resources Food Bank during the month of June. The food bank has been severely depleted and needs our contributions. A basket is in the vestibule/narthex to receive your contributions. Please plan to bring something each week.

Hiram Patrenos

Saint Jacob's Church?

In almost every language, the name that we call James is some form of Jacob (Arabic, Yaq'ub; Dutch, Jakob; French, Jacques; German, Jakob; Greek, Iakobos [Ἰακωβος], Hebrew Ya'akov [יעקב]; Italian, Giacomo); Russian, Iakov [Иаков], etc.). Only in Spanish and its related languages is it Jaime or something similar. Even in English, the adjective for James is Jacobean (the language of King James I's time is called Jacobean English). In the New Testament, the name we translate James is the Greek Iakobos, which is the same name used for Isaac's son Jacob in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint).

So how, then, did the Hebrew Ya'akov and the Greek Iakobos¹ turn into James? In around the 13th century the Latin *Jacobus* somehow became *Jacomus* (at about the same time the Italian name *Giacomo* appeared).² At some time soon thereafter, perhaps as a diminutive, the middle syllable *-co-* disappeared, and *Jacomus* became *Jamus*.³ A hundred years later, in the late 14th century, John Wycliffe made the first English translation of the Bible. In the Old Testament he was consistent with the use of the name *Jacob*, but in the New Testament he translated it *James*. It is not clear why, but there is a very credible theory. Wycliffe was strongly anti-Semitic, and he may have sought to disassociate the New Testament characters from their Jewish roots. Whatever the reason, the tradition stuck, and almost every English translation since has rendered Ya'akov or Iakobos as *Jacob* in the Old Testament and *James* in the New. The immediate reaction might be "so what?", but there are several problems involved with this.

One practical problem is that in today's international society, many non-English-speaking students are confused by this, especially inasmuch as a huge amount of biblical scholarship

¹ Remember that in linguistics, *b* and *v* are virtually interchangeable.

² As with *b* and *v*, the sounds *b* and *m* are often interchanged. This is reasonable when we consider that both are formed similarly with the lips.

³ In Gaelic it is *Seamus* (pron. shame-us), and in Welsh it is *Hamish*.

is written in English. Although this is not serious in its own right, it can cause awkwardness, particularly when work is being done in a multilingual environment.¹

A greater theological problem is that by using the name James we tend to lose the Jewish ties with the Old Testament. In Jesus' time Jacob was the 15th most popular name in Palestine. In fact, Joseph's father was Jacob (Matt. 1:16). By the time of the 2nd century AD diaspora, Jacob was the 4th most popular name. Using James instead of Jacob in the New Testament blurs the Jewish roots of Christianity. This may have been exactly what Wycliffe, an anti-Semite, had in mind.

Early weak translations tend to get so deeply embedded in tradition that they are almost impossible to dislodge. A poor early translation has Eve being made from Adam's rib instead of from his side, and one portrays Jesus and Joseph as carpenters rather than the more likely stonemasons. These have become so deeply rooted in tradition, however, that it is unlikely that they will ever be corrected. On the other hand, there was not a lot of difficulty changing Siam to Thailand, Bombay to Mumbai, Burma to Myanmar or Peking to Beijing, so perhaps someday Christians will read the Epistle of Saint Jacob and worship in the Church of Saint Jacob the Less.

Richard R. Losch+

*People who have time on their hands will inevitably waste
the time of people who have work to do.*

—Thomas Sowell

¹ This significantly delayed the progress of research and the ultimate forgery trial in the case of the so-called James Ossuary. Many Europeans working on the case did not at first realize that Jacob and James are the same name. For those unfamiliar with the case, the James Ossuary is allegedly the ossuary (bone-box) of Saint James of Jerusalem, whom the Bible calls "the brother of the Lord." Its inscription says, "James the son of Joseph and brother of Jesus." It is not yet clear whether the ossuary is a forgery (James, Joseph and Jesus [Ya'akov, Yusef and Yeshua] were all common names in those days). Research is continuing on the ossuary, and "the jury is still out."

The Amber in Ezekiel's Vision

When God first spoke to the Prophet Ezekiel he did not come in a “still small voice” as he did to Elijah. Rather, he put on quite a show: “I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal” (Ezek. 1:4, NIV). The King James translates the last phrase, “and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire.” The Tanakh (Jewish Bible) uses the phrase “gleaming amber.” This passage represents one of the great difficulties in translating and interpreting the Bible. The original Hebrew word is *chasmal* (חַשְׁמַל), and therein lies the problem—no one is sure what it means. The only time it is used anywhere is three times in Ezekiel (1:4, 1:27, 8:2). When it was first translated into Greek (the Septuagint) they used the Greek *elektron* (ἤλεκτρον), amber,¹ so the early translators into English used the word amber. We don't know exactly what the *chasmal* of Ezekiel's vision was, but it was certainly surrounded by a furious thunderstorm. Perhaps the “gleaming amber” was a fiery maelstrom started by lightning. At any rate, God surely spoke with authority!

In the 20th century the founders of the modern State of Israel chose to use Hebrew as their official language. It had not been a spoken language for thousands of years except in Jewish scholarly circles and by some of the late 19th century Jewish settlers there, so it became necessary to bring it up to date. For example, there were no words for such things as automobile, tractor, radio or electricity. They chose to use the mysterious word *chasmal* for electricity, because two thousand years earlier the Alexandrian rabbis translated it into Greek as *elektron*. Today in Israel electricity is *chasmal*.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ *Elektron* is the root of the word electricity (and, of course, of electron). The ancient Greeks did not know of electricity, but they did know that if you rub amber with wool it will produce sparks (static electricity). When electricity was discovered, it was logical to use the Greek word for amber (*elektron*) as the root for the name of this new discovery.

The Forgiveness of Sin

One of the most basic tenets of Christianity is the forgiveness of sin, which is attained through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. John the Baptizer recognized this at the beginning of Christ's earthy ministry when he called his followers' attention to Jesus with the cry, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Any faithful Jew would have recognized the phrase "Lamb of God" as referring to the Passover sacrifice.

The idea of the sacrificial lamb and the forgiveness of sin is all very nice to talk about, but what does it actually mean? First of all, it is important to draw the distinction between Salvation and Forgiveness. Salvation comes through our very being as it is united with Christ. It is a free and unearned gift of God—grace—that opens to us the possibility of heaven in spite of our unworthiness. Salvation has nothing to do with a debt owed to God or with obedience to law. When the Son of God took on humanity and came into history as Jesus of Nazareth, he united all of humanity with his deity. Through this union forgiveness of sin is possible. When we sin, however, we incur a spiritual debt that tends to build a barrier that blocks us from God. God does not cut us off, we cut ourselves off from him. The more we sin without seeking forgiveness, the more we strengthen this barrier until we potentially reach a point that we have cut ourselves off from God so much that we cease even to care about sin or forgiveness.

A newborn infant is incapable of committing sin, because he has no concept of right and wrong. He will learn very quickly that some acts result in punishment and some in reward, and he will accordingly start to modify his behavior. There will come a time, however, when he begins to understand that some things are right just because they are right and not simply because they are rewarded, and that some things are wrong just because they are wrong regardless of whether they are punished or even found out. That is what is called theologically reaching an age of discretion. When he reaches

the age of discretion two things happen: (1) he will from time to time consciously choose to do something he knows is wrong—he will voluntarily sin—and (2) he will from that point forward be held responsible for the sins he commits. In a word, he will pass from being an innocent to being a sinner.¹

Sin is any thought, word or deed that is inconsistent with the will of God or contrary to his nature. Anything contrary to God is sinful, whether it be murder or a little “white lie.” In human terms, however, we tend to rank sin from the truly egregious to the relatively mild and harmless. The Church recognizes the difference between Venial Sin (sin that is not immediately dangerous to others or to our salvation) and Mortal Sin (sin that puts us in peril of damnation if not immediately dealt with and repented). There are two aspects of sin that need to be considered: Original Sin (the sin of our origin, which is the flaw that enables us to sin) and Actual Sin (the sin of act, i.e. the sins we actually commit). Actual sin includes both sins of commission and sins of omission.

Even the innocent newborn has Original Sin. Contrary to the common misunderstanding, Original Sin has nothing to do with the fact that we were sexually conceived. Sex is not innately sinful. It is a gift from God enabling us to fulfill his command to reproduce. Sin enters when sex is abused. Mankind is a fallen species, and since our parents are sinners, we are also sinners. That is what is meant by Original Sin, the sin of our origin. It is not in the strictest sense sin, because it is not an act of disobedience of God. Rather, it is a moral handicap that results in sin. It does not seem fair that we should be held responsible for something over which we have no control (i.e., the flaw that enables us to sin). God agrees that it is

¹ This is the meaning of the allegory of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit, which represents their attaining discretion (the knowledge of good and evil). In order to attain that, it was not necessary for them to disobey. Being tempted, recognizing that disobedience was wrong, and refusing to yield to the temptation would have been sufficient for them to have attained discretion, and no sin would have been committed.

not fair, so he gave us the grace of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, which removes from us the responsibility for that flaw. Once we are baptized we are completely free from the stain of Original Sin. To symbolize this, immediately after you were baptized the priest marked a cross on your forehead with the water of baptism, with the words, “You are marked as Christ’s own forever.” From the point of our baptism, whether as infants or adults, we are thereafter responsible only for the sins we commit, not for the flaw that enables them.

Actual sin is a little harder to deal with, because we are weak and constantly bombarded with temptation.¹ We live in a world so filled with contradictions and so corrupted by human desires that we often find ourselves in situations where all the alternatives are sinful. Consider this case, for example: you look out the window and see a man about to murder a little child, and the only way you can save the child is by shooting the man. It is a sin to kill the man, but it is also a sin to stand by doing nothing and allow the man to kill the child. You have to make a snap decision between two sins, and you have no time to ponder the matter. On a wider scale, war is sinful, yet some wars might be justified. Which would have been the greater sin—to engage in a war to stop Hitler, or to avoid the sin of war and allow his atrocities to continue? There is no simple answer to either of these situations. Perhaps an even greater sin lies with those who could have stopped Hitler in the early days of his rise before war was necessary to do so.² The question then rises, if the only alternatives are all sinful and you choose what in your conscience is the least sinful, is

¹ G. K. Chesterton said that we should be glad when we are tempted. If we are not being tempted, that means that Satan already has us and is not going to waste any more effort continuing to tempt us. If we are tempted it means that we still have a chance to resist and be saved.

² There are many science fiction stories of going back in a time machine and killing Hitler when he was still an innocent little boy. Would you do that if you could? It’s not that easy a decision. It also makes one wonder what even greater horror might have arisen in place of Nazism.

it then a sin? Theologians have wrestled with this for ages.

Now comes an even more frightening thought. Any sin against a perfect and infinite God is an infinite sin. Any sin! Even though the Church draws the distinction between venial and mortal sin and believes that this is considered in the Last Judgment, the little “white lie” is still a lie. A lie is an offense to an infinite God, and thus incurs an infinite debt. Infinite is infinite, and therefore from one point of view the little lie is as egregious as a mass murder. In other words, there is no sin so small that its moral debt is finitely measurable, so there is no sin so small that we could ever pay the debt for it. This puts us in a fatal Catch-22 that only God can get us out of. That is where Christ’s sacrifice on the cross comes in.

Jesus of Nazareth, who is fully God and yet also fully human, was sinless in his humanity, and therefore not worthy of suffering or death. God the Son, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, took humanity upon himself for one primary purpose, and that was to suffer and die in payment for the infinite debt of mankind. Being God, his offering is infinite, and thus pays that infinite debt. And since through Holy Baptism we become a part of him in the Church, the Body of Christ, we participate in that perfect sacrifice that he makes for us eternally. This is deep theology, granted, but it is important because it is what the Church is all about. Through the Sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist we participate eternally in his sacrifice and thus through it are enabled to have our sins forgiven if we are truly repentant. Without the forgiveness of sin, everything else the Church does is meaningless to us, because without it we are damned whether or not we perform great good works in this life.

Imagine that you owe me a million dollars, and there is no possible way that you could pay the debt. I have three options. One is that I could take you to court and ruin you financially (and possibly socially), but I would not do that because I love you. This would be the equivalent of God’s sending you to Hell. In the old days I could send you to debtor’s prison until you paid, knowing that in prison there is no way you

could ever pay. Debtor's prison (like Hell) is merely punishment, not a means of restitution. Another option is that I could "cook the books" and simply wipe out the debt, arbitrarily saying that you now owe me nothing. That is actually a legal fiction. You incurred the debt and therefore it is still owed, but I am simply not going to require you to pay it. My third option is to provide for you the means to raise the money to pay the debt, and then let you retain your dignity by doing so. This is essentially what God did for us. The reason God chose this third course is made apparent in Jesus' parable of the unforgiving debtor (Matt. 18:23ff). In our human nature, it is unlikely that many of us would ever recognize the seriousness of our debt of sin if it were simply wiped out. For us to be truly absolved of our sin, the debt must be paid one way or another. Christ, as one of us, paid it for us.¹

This is where the Catholic Churches (Roman, Orthodox, Anglican and ironically, some Lutheran branches) disagree with the teachings of Luther and Calvin and most of their followers. Luther taught that God, knowing that we are incapable of paying the debt of sin, simply wipes it out and forgets it. Catholicism argues that if this is the case then there is no need for Jesus to have died on the cross. If God forgets something then it is no longer in his mind—and if something is not in God's mind then it ceases ever to have existed. It is important that the debt not cease to exist, but rather that it be used as a vehicle of rebuilding our relationship with God. We often hear the phrase, "Forgive and forget." If you can forget an offense then it must not have been very important in the first place. The essence of forgiveness is rebuilding and strengthening a damaged relationship. Consider a man who is unfaithful to his wife and truly repents, and she forgives him. She is not saying that it didn't matter—if she can do that then the relationship was broken to start with—what she is saying

¹ "If anyone sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the perfect offering for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 1f).

is that she loves him enough to rebuild the relationship. When that happens, like a healed broken bone, it is often even stronger afterward than it was to start with. That is the essence of forgiveness, and it is exactly what happens with our relationship with God when we repent and accept his forgiveness. That is why the debt must be paid and not simply cast aside as if it never really mattered in the first place.

Forgiveness of actual sins is not automatic. In order to receive it we must truly repent, attempt to undo or repair any damage done to others, intend to amend our lives to avoid committing the same sin again, and ask God for forgiveness. It is not sufficient simply to acknowledge that we are sinners. This is important because otherwise we might pay no attention at all to our sins, but it is not enough by itself. The General Confession that we use in most of our public worship serves simply to inspire us to go the next step in doing what we need to do in order to be forgiven. What is needed is an honest and thorough self-examination and confession. The Catholic Churches provide a sacramental means for this called the Sacrament of Holy Penance or the Sacrament of Reconciliation, commonly called Confession (also known as Auricular Confession). This involves confession of actual sins to a priest. The priest may not reveal to anyone whatsoever anything that is said to him in the confessional, under pain of the most grievous mortal sin. He may not even discuss it privately with the penitent except during the actual confession or with his permission given at the time of the confession. This is called the "Seal of the Confessional." Some Protestant sects practice public confession to the entire congregation. This was done in the very early Church, but was abolished because of the obvious potential abuse of it. While the Anglican Church does not require Auricular Confession, it is offered as a sacrament. This does not mean, however, that it does not expect self-examination and personal confession to God of one's actual sins. The advantage of Auricular Confession is that it forces you to examine yourself to the point that you can put your sins into words. If you cannot do that, you do not

fully understand them or grasp their seriousness. God does not need you to enumerate your sins in order to find out what you have done—he already knows full well—but you need to be able to enumerate them in order to be able to confront them. As we said, it is not enough just to acknowledge that you are a sinner. The priest is empowered by the Church to forgive your sins in the name of God. This absolution is a significant part of the Sacrament of Holy Penance, and is very important.¹ Also, confession to a trained and experienced person allows for good counsel and advice in the best way to deal with your sins. Many people are not comfortable confessing to a priest that they know personally, and this is understandable. There is nothing wrong with going to one that you do not know, although someone who knows you might be more helpful in counseling and advising you.²

There is one final aspect of forgiveness that we need to remember. If God has forgiven our sins, who are we not to forgive ourselves? If you have truly repented of a sin and have asked God's forgiveness, it is forgiven. It is a sin, therefore, to continue to dwell on it other than to continue trying to amend your life so that you do not do it again. Trust God's love and his promise that he will indeed forgive.

Richard R. Losch+

“The Epistle” Is Online

The last four years' issues of *The Epistle* are online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the “Epistle” tab at the top, then click on the issue you want to see. You can read it online or download it as a *.pdf* file.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ “And he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven’” (John 20:22f).

² Priests know how to leave everything behind in the confessional and not let it affect their relationship with a penitent, but this is often hard for the laity to understand or accept.

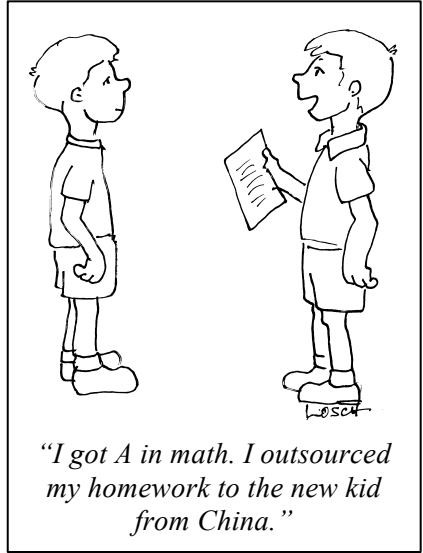
Nothing New

Ecclesiastes told us that there is nothing new under the sun. A pre-human foot bone has been found in South Africa that is at least 1.7 million years old. It was infected with osteosarcoma, an aggressive form of bone cancer that is still common today. Whatever triggers it goes back far before modern chemical pollutants or food preservatives.

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JAMIE

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