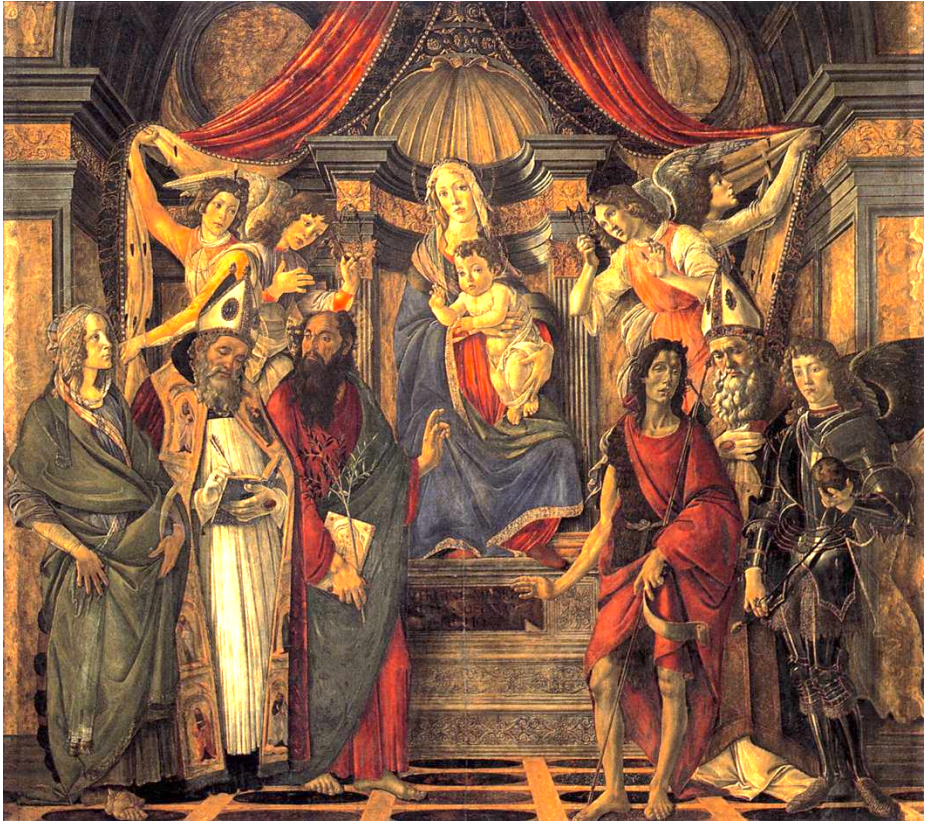


THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

Volume XXV, Number 6

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June 2018

This Month's Cover

Our cover is another of Sandro Botticelli's masterpieces, the *Saint Barnabas Altarpiece*, completed in 1488. It is tempera on a wood panel, measuring 8'6"x9'2". It is displayed in the Uffizi Museum in Florence, Italy. We present it this month in recognition of the Feast of Saint Barnabas on June 11. It depicts the enthronement of the Virgin Mary as the Queen of Heaven, one of Botticelli's favorite subjects. She holds the infant Jesus, and at her feet are six saints, from left to right St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. Augustine of Hippo, St. Barnabas the Apostle, St. John the Baptist, St. Ignatius of Antioch, and St. Michael the Archangel. This panel is the center of the altarpiece. It was originally surrounded by seven smaller panels depicting scenes from the lives of the six saints in the main panel, and one of the Passion of Christ. Only four survive today. Like last month's painting, it is in very poor repair. While age took a serious toll on it, more damage was done in the 18th century by clumsy attempts to restore and overpaint it, and an attempt to enlarge it. It is currently being restored by skilled conservationists using state-of-the-art technology.

The Guild of Doctors and Apothecaries was one of the most powerful guilds in Florence. They were the patrons of the Church of Saint Barnabas, and in about 1485 they commissioned Botticelli to paint the altarpiece. The six saints portrayed at the feet of Mary were patron saints of various important establishments in Florence. St. Barnabas, of course, was the eponymous patron of the church, and St. John the Baptist was (and still is) the patron saint of Florence. Saints Augustine and Ignatius were major early Christian theologians, and St. Michael is the Archangel who defeated Lucifer. St. Catherine was a 4th century scholar and martyr whose cult was extremely important and influential in late medieval Europe.

For a brief sketch of Sandro Botticelli's life we refer you to last month's *Epistle*.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

The three greatest gifts that God gave us at our creation are life, freedom of will, and intellect. Although it is a mortal sin to do so, we can end our lives if we so choose. We can submit to the control of others and yield up our freedom of will in exchange for peace and safety—we have been given the freedom of will to give up our freedom of will. And while we have been given the gift of intellect, we are free not to use or develop it. We are free to reject all the gifts that God has given us, but we do so at our own peril.

God has seen fit to dispense intelligence over a wide range of degrees, but intelligence and intellect are not the same thing. Intelligence is the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills. Intellect is the use of that intelligence to whatever degree we have been given it, by reasoning and thinking. I submit that the greatest of God's gifts is intellect, because without it life and freedom become meaningless. Ignorance is probably the most powerful weapon that evil can use against us because it makes us malleable to the satanic purpose of turning us away from God. I have frequently pointed out that the appalling ignorance of so many of our young people today is no accident. It is intentional, because you cannot control a well-educated populace. I hasten to add, however, that this is not some secret conspiracy of a cabal of politicians who seek to control us. Rather, it is the result of satanic interference that has drawn us into ourselves and slowly induced us to replace our values not with lesser values, but with no values at all. We used to be an immoral society—one that often fails to live up to its values—but we are now rapidly becoming an amoral society—one that has no real values, because those it has are continually being

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adjusted to fit convenience or comfort. This is satanic ignorance, which is an ignorance that results from a lethargic failure to use our intellect to seek truth. One of our greatest responsibilities as people of faith is to seek the truth. This is hard work that requires the use of our intellect, but Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth. He did not promise to give us the truth, but to lead us to it. It is our responsibility, through the use of our intellect, to follow him and do all that we can to discern that truth. This is not an easy task, and it will never be accomplished if we shut our minds to things that conflict with our ideas or offend us. I can't think of a quicker way to stimulate the mind than to be offended. It gets the adrenaline stirring and makes us think. Thomas Jefferson said that if he could read only once newspaper he would read his opponent's. This is why I so loathe "political correctness." Both our society and the Church—not just the Episcopal Church, but the whole body of the faithful—have become so dedicated to being inoffensive that they have failed to teach even the most basic moral and theological values. Granted, these often are by their very nature offensive to worldly society, but that is their purpose—to elevate us above our basic human nature, which can often be a very ugly thing.

What can we do about it? Think. Run away from "safe places" and seek a few uncomfortable ones. And think. Study the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church. And think. Listen to the opinions of those who disagree with you. Don't necessarily accept them, but at least consider them. And think.

Father Rick Losch

Be Wordly Wise

Embarrass

This interesting word has had a whole new meaning come to it in the past couple of centuries. Today it means to make one feel awkward or self-conscious, with a strong overtone of shame or disgrace. In its earlier use in English it meant to hinder or halter. The only modern use of the word that leans in

that direction is the phrase “to be financially embarrassed,” which means to be financially hindered. It derives from the Early French *embarrasser*, which came into French from the Early Spanish *embarazzar*, to put a bar into. This in turn came from the Latin *imbarrare*, to support or make rigid by inserting a bar. We can easily understand why this could eventually develop into a word meaning to hinder. Why it evolved into a word meaning to shame is unclear—it is possibly because when one is embarrassed (with shame or awkwardness) he is hindered in his ability to behave in an otherwise normal way.

Richard R. Losch+

Parish Directory Update

We will be updating the Parish Directory during June and will publish the updated Directory as of July 1, 2018. Copies of the Parish Directory 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@bell-south.net.

Hiram Patrenos

Altar Flower Volunteers

Volunteers are needed to provide Altar Flowers. A sign-up chart is located in the Sacristy. You may use flowers from your yard or, if you wish, make arrangements with the florist to provide them. For more information, please speak with Carolyn Patrenos.

Hiram Patrenos

Moving?

If you are planning to move, please let us know your new address. You can reach us at P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470, or email me at rlosch33@gmail.com.

Richard R. Losch+

Ordinary Time

Ordinary Time is what the Church Calendar calls the periods between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday, and between Pentecost and Advent. The total length of the Epiphany and Pentecost sections is 33-34 weeks, but the length of each section varies according to the date of Easter. In the Anglican tradition the Sundays of these weeks are commonly labelled the *n*th Sunday after the Epiphany and the *n*th Sunday after Pentecost.¹ In the Roman Catholic tradition they are usually called the *n*th Sunday in Ordinary Time.² Their liturgical color is green,³ and they represent the longest season of the Church year.

In common usage the word “ordinary” implies something that is commonplace and thus unimportant. That is a relatively modern use of the word, but because of it many people assume that these Sunday are not particularly significant. In the Church’s use of it, this is not at all the case. Latin has two related words: *cardinalis*, which refers to a sequence of numbers, and *ordinalis*, which refers to a sequence of numbered items. In English we refer to the cardinal numbers (1, 2, 3, ...) and to the ordinal numbers (first, second, third, ...). Thus ordinary time is so called not because it is commonplace, but because it consists of a sequence of numbered Sundays. Ordinary Time, then, is far from commonplace or unimportant. It contains a number of extraordinary commemorations and observances.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ The Church of England (and the Episcopal Church until 1979) calls them the *n*th Sunday Epiphany and after after Trinity. The Eastern Orthodox Churches label all Sundays of the Church year as Sundays after Pentecost.

² Until 1970 the Roman Catholic Church also called then Sundays after Epiphany and after Pentecost.

³ The three primary liturgical colors are purple, representing penitence (Advent and Lent), white, representing purity and rejoicing (Christmas and Easter), and green, representing growth (the Epiphany and Pentecost portions of Ordinary Time). The other color is red, representing either fire or blood (feasts of the Holy Spirit and commemorations of martyrs). Black, rose, and blue, although once relatively common, are very rarely used today except in a handful of churches.

Washing the Hands

Torah (the Jewish Law) specifies in several places the conditions under which one must wash his body and his clothes, and in particular a large number of times when one must wash his hands. This was not just a question of hygiene (although much of it obviously originated from hygienic concerns), it was also a matter of ritual uncleanness. Ritual uncleanness required specific actions in order to become purified. Sometimes this meant simple washing, but occasionally it involved complicated rituals of washing, prayer and sacrifice. In serious cases the process of purification could take weeks. When one was ritually unclean he could have no direct or indirect physical contact with other Jews, could not participate in religious rituals other than his own purification, and could not enter the Temple except under specified circumstances to offer sacrifice.¹ Because of these laws the Jews ranked with the Egyptians and the Romans as the cleanest people in the ancient world.²

The Pharisees were well-versed in the Law, and were considered official interpreters of it. Oftentimes their interpretations became so ingrained into the culture that they had the weight of the Law itself. One of the Pharisaic requirements was that one must wash his hands before eating. Whether or not this expectation was based on hygiene is unclear, because the ancients had no concept of germ theory. They may have noticed that particularly dirty people were more subject to disease, but they actually had little understanding of the nature of disease or of how it is transmitted. In any case, the Pharisaic requirement had become so significant a part of the tradition that

¹ For example, a woman was ritually unclean for 40 days after giving birth. This was not a matter of misogyny, but was based on hygiene. A woman and her newborn are particularly subject to infection during this period, and for their protection they were not allowed any more contact with the outside world than was absolutely necessary. There was a formal ritual for purification and the child's presentation after 40 days (Lk. 2:22ff).

² They may have been even cleaner than the Romans because they did not have public baths. See "Very Clean, But Not So Much" in the October 2017 *Epistle*.

anyone who violated it was considered to have violated the Law itself. In Mark 7 we read that Jesus was chastised by the Pharisees because he and his disciples did not wash their hands before eating. In Judea this had become “a tradition of the elders” (Mk. 7:3), but that may not have been the case in Galilee. Notwithstanding, Jesus and his disciples were seen eating “with defiled hands” (7:2), and the Scribes and Pharisees, who were delighted to find something of which to accuse them, immediately challenged them.

Jesus’ response was to point out their own hypocrisy by accusing them of twisting the Law to allow them to dishonor their own parents in violation of the law to honor your father and mother (Mk. 7: 6-13). He then turned to the Levitical Law, the Torah, to say that “there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile” (vs. 15). Leviticus 15 points out that it is the bodily discharges, “the things that come out,” that make one unclean, not the things that enter the body. While Leviticus was dealing with physical matters, Jesus turned to the spiritual side of the issue. He explained to the disciples that it is what comes out of the heart that can defile a man, not what enters the stomach “and goes out into the sewer” (Mk. 7:17-23).

In that explanation to his disciples Mark adds the comment, “Thus he declared all foods clean” (vs. 19b). Of all the four gospels, Mark is by far the most Jewish. Since the Levitical dietary laws clearly identify many foods as unclean (e.g. pork and shellfish), this would seem inconsistent with Mark’s views. Because of this many scholars have suggested that this is an editorial addition made later by Gentile Christians. I suggest, however, that this is completely consistent with Mark’s Jewishness, and is an integral part of his argument. In defending the Torah against the Pharisees’ hypocritical interpretation of it, Jesus is defending a long-standing Galilean Jewish tradition that foods cannot make a person unclean. It is not the forbidden food itself that makes one unclean, but rather the open disobedience of God’s Law by eating forbidden food.

Richard R. Losch+

Repetitive Prayer and the Mantra

Jesus said, “When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Matt. 6:7 KJV). The question is often raised as to what actually constitutes “vain repetitions.” Most Christian churches pray the Lord’s Prayer at least once at every service, yet this is not considered repetitive prayer. Likewise, liturgical churches use the same rituals (generally the Eucharist) at almost every service, yet this too is not considered repetitive.¹ Neither are the *Kyrie* or *Agnus Dei*, which do involve repetition. What then is the difference?

The Greek word is *battalogesete* (βατταλογήσητε), which literally means stammering. Some translations of the Bible render this passage “do not babble like the pagans.” Many pagan religions, particularly in the ancient Middle East, believed that rapid repetition of prayers was like throwing coins into a pot—as more coins meant more treasure, more prayers meant more favor of the gods. The more times you repeated a prayer the more the gods would listen to it and answer it. In some Buddhist sects even today they use what are called prayer wheels. These are cylinders with prayers written on them. They are suspended from a cord and spun, and every time the cylinder rotates on its axis another prayer is sent up to heaven. It is practices like these that Jesus condemned. The reason that they are deemed wrong is that they are based on sheer volume of prayer with no consideration for its meaning or spiritual value. They are thus empty and meaningless.

There are other forms of prayer that while literally repetitive are not vain, because they have clear meaning and enhance spirituality. One of these is an ancient form adopted by Christianity called the mantra. A mantra is a prayer that is repeated continually for the purpose of clearing the mind and driving away distractions, either during meditation or in preparation

¹ There are some Protestant sects that rarely use the Lord’s Prayer on the grounds that it is repetitive, but they are not common, and are not in the mainstream of Protestant Christianity.

for it. A classic Hindu form of the mantra is a chant called the *Hare Krishna*. It invokes the Sanskrit names of three avatars of the god Brahma, Hare, Krishna and Rama, and repeats them over and over again.¹ Its purpose is not to focus on them, but to say the names repeatedly in order to clear the mind of distracting thoughts and to focus on some point of meditation. What this requires is a deliberate intention to focus on some spiritual mystery or event (such as, for Christians, the Annunciation), and to explore mentally its meaning and implications. Although Christianity has adopted the practice of the mantra in prayer, the Hare Krishna mantra or anything similar to it is never used because it invokes the names of pagan deities.

A mantra can also be physical rather than verbal. The most common physical form of a mantra is yoga, which again is a series of physical movements designed to clear the mind in preparation for meditation. A great deal of the yoga practiced in America today, however, is treated as a form of exercise rather than as an act of spirituality. Some forms of the oriental martial arts are also physical mantras, despite the common misunderstanding that they are primarily combat training. While combat and physical contact are a part of them, martial arts such as karate and kung-fu are actually mantra-like ritual dances designed to focus the mind as well as to discipline the body. The main difference is that they are more aimed at mental and physical self-discipline than at spiritual growth.

By far the most common Christian mantra is the Rosary. It consists of the physical mantra of handling the beads, and the verbal one of repeating the “Hail Mary.”² This is often denounced by Protestants as mindless “vain repetition” and because they reject veneration of the Blessed Virgin, but when

¹ The mantra is *Om Hare Krishna Hare Krishna/ Krishna Krishna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama/ Rama Rama Hare Hare Om*. The syllable *Om* is sacred in Hinduism, and is believed to be the “cosmic sound,” a sound that pervades the whole of eternity.

² “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

properly prayed the Rosary is a powerful tool for meditation. While it may be used for meditating on any spiritual matter, there are traditionally fifteen episodes in the life of Christ that are the focus of the Rosary meditations. There are five each of the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries.¹ The main part of a traditional Rosary consists of a chain of five sets of ten beads each, called decades, enabling the meditator to count off ten Hail Marys for each mystery. The purpose, as we mentioned above, is not to pay attention to the words, but through repetition of them to clear the mind from distractions in order to meditate on the mysteries. Using the beads frees the mind from having to pay attention to counting. A full Rosary is a very long meditation, and often people pray only a decade or two at a time or meditate on only one set of five mysteries.

Vain repetition of prayers is not only a waste of time, it is sinful because it treats God as if he were some kind of divine dispensing machine that automatically responds to prescribed rituals and ceremonies. This is how many pagan religions see their gods, but it is totally inconsistent with Christianity and Judaism. The use of mantras, on the other hand, while they are repetitive, can be a powerful tool for clearing the mind in order to pull it away from the busy-ness of the world and become closer to God, and thus to become more receptive to him.

Richard R. Losch+

*Always keep your words soft, sweet and tender, because
it is likely that someday you will have to eat them.*

¹ *The Joyful Mysteries*: The Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Presentation, and the Finding of Jesus in the Temple; *The Sorrowful Mysteries*: The Agony in the Garden, the Scourging, the Crowning with Thorns, Carrying the Cross, and the Crucifixion; *The Glorious Mysteries*: The Resurrection, the Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, and the Coronation of the Blessed Virgin. In 2002 Pope John Paul II recommended five auxiliary meditations, *The Luminous Mysteries*: The Baptism of Jesus, the Wedding at Cana of Galilee, Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the Transfiguration, and the Institution of the Holy Eucharist.

“Touch Me Not”

On the morning of the Resurrection Mary Magdalene, when she found the tomb empty, saw what she thought was the gardener and asked him where they had taken Jesus' body. The resurrected Christ then revealed himself to her and as she started to embrace him he said, “Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” (Jn. 20:17). A few days later, however, he commanded Thomas to touch his wounds (Jn. 20:27).

Why was Mary forbidden to touch him, yet later Thomas was commanded to? The answer is found in Hebrews 9:11f, “But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, ... he entered once for all into the Holy Place, ... thus obtaining eternal redemption.” Each year on the Day of Atonement the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary of the Temple, bearing the blood of a goat that had been sacrificed in atonement for the sins of the people. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, was the perfect and final sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. He was not only the sacrificial Passover lamb (the “Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world” [Jn. 1:29]), he was also the sacrificing High Priest who offered himself on the Altar of the Cross. The Risen Christ, the eternal High Priest, was performing the eternal redemptive act in the heavenly Tabernacle that was symbolically performed annually by the Jewish High Priest on the Day of Atonement. As the Jewish High Priest entered the Holy of Holies with the blood a sacrificial goat, so Christ entered the heavenly Tabernacle with his own sacrificial blood, completing the sacrifice that once and for all saved all mankind. He told Mary to tell the others that he was ascending to his Father, yet the Ascension did not take place until forty days later, and then in the presence of the Apostles. It was not the Ascension that he was talking about, but his entering into the heavenly Tabernacle to complete his duties as Eternal High Priest.

According to the Law the High priest could not perform this duty if he were in any way defiled, and any direct or indirect

contact with death was a defilement (Lev. 21:1). Mary had just gone into the tomb and had thus contacted death. This made her ritually unclean until she could be ceremonially purified. For this reason she was forbidden to touch the risen Christ until he had completed his High Priestly duty.

This should not have made any difference to God, who cannot be defiled, except that when he came into the world in his humanity he dealt with us in human terms—terms that we could understand—and this included obedience to the Law. As a faithful Jew dealing with faithful Jews, Christ remained faithful to the Jewish Law until the full act of redemption in obedience to that Law had been fulfilled. Thus Mary, who had contacted death, could not touch him until after his High Priestly duty had been completed.

Richard R. Losch+

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene is one of the most controversial and enigmatic characters in the gospels, and possibly one of the most maligned. She has been called a reformed prostitute and a healed madwoman, and the early Gnostic heresies even tried to paint her as the wife of Jesus (a theme picked up by Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code*). There is no evidence for any of this, and in fact we know very little about her. Mary¹ was as common a name in Jesus' time as it is today, and Magdalene indicates that she was from the town of Migdal or Magdala on the coast of the Sea of Galilee. Although she has been an extremely important person in Christian tradition from the very beginning, she is not even mentioned in Matthew, Mark or John until the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Luke mentions her only once before the Crucifixion, when he talks about the women who accompanied Jesus and the Apostles and were Jesus' financial supporters. He specifically named Mary, Joanna and Susanna (Lk. 8:2f). He says these women had been cured of "evil spirits

¹ The name was actually Miriamne, which is usually translated either Mary, Maria or Miriam. Jesus' mother would have been named Miriamne.

and infirmities,” and that “seven demons had gone out” from Mary Magdalene.

How, then, did the idea arise that Mary was a repentant prostitute?¹ Prostitution was considered a grievous sin in those days, even worthy of death, but it had never been associated with demonic possession.² Demonic possession was their explanation for many diseases, particularly mental illness, but not for simple immorality. Mary may have been cured of some mental illness such as clinical depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia, but we can never know for sure. We do know, however, how she came to be known as a prostitute. In the sixth century Pope Gregory the Great preached a famous sermon in which he held her up as the ideal model of the repentant sinner who becomes a great saint. John in his gospel tells of the prostitute who was saved from stoning by Jesus (John 7:53ff), and Luke tells of the sinful woman (probably a prostitute) who anointed Jesus’ feet at a banquet (Lk. 7:36ff). The latter story immediately precedes his mention of Mary Magdalene in the next chapter. Pope Gregory, with no evidential justification, conflated both these stories with that of Mary Magdalene, identifying all three women as one. The idea stuck and has been taught ever since. As Dr. Birger Pearson says, “Thus was invented the original hooker with a heart of gold.”³

The other idea about Mary Magdalene, that she was Jesus’ wife, lay virtually dead for over 1600 years until Dan Brown revived it in *The Da Vinci Code*. In the 4th century there were several heretical sects in Egypt who produced a number of

¹ The tradition of Mary’s being a prostitute is found only in the Western Church. In the Eastern Church she is revered as an Apostle, and has never been accused of having led a previously sinful life.

² The Romans, on the other hand, had no problem with prostitution. They brought prostitutes along with the army to service the soldiers, and they built whole sections of towns to house the prostitutes. The emperor Claudius’ dear friend and closest confidante was the prostitute Calpurnia.

³ Birger Pearson is professor emeritus of religious studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and is one of the leading scholars of the Gnostic Coptic Gospels, one of which identifies Mary as Jesus’ wife.

gospels known as the Gnostic or Coptic Gospels. Most of them are outrageously fanciful and imaginative. In one of them Jesus refers to Mary Magdalene as his wife, and in another he frequently kisses her on the lips. Most of the Gnostic Gospels were rejected as heresy by the Church in the 4th century.

In Jesus' day it was unusual for a man older than his early twenties to be unmarried, but it was not at all unheard of. Not only were there some who simply were not yet ready to make the commitment, but there were also individuals and whole communities who took vows of celibacy. Several (but not all) of the Essene communities were celibate and not totally unlike later Christian monastic communities. Celibacy was considered a bit peculiar by the Jews, but it was accepted. For example, it is highly unlikely that John the Baptist was married. To the Romans and Greeks, on the other hand, celibacy was seriously frowned upon except for the Vestal Virgins, who after a 30-year term as Vestals were free to marry and were expected to do so.¹ We know that Peter was married (Mt. 8:14) and there are indications that at least most of the Apostles were, but the gospels do not give the slightest hint that Jesus was. If he recognized what his mission was before he actually entered into it, as he very likely did (Lk. 2:41ff), it is reasonable that he would have chosen to remain celibate. Even in the unlikely event that Jesus was married, one of the last candidates to be considered as his possible wife would be Mary Magdalene.

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last five years of *The Epistle* are now online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the "Epistle" tab at the top. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file. This is an easy way to share articles with others.

Richard R. Los

¹ Most became Vestals at the age of 6 to 10, and usually accrued considerable wealth during their years of service. At 36 to 40 when they were released they were very desirable brides, especially for older widowers.

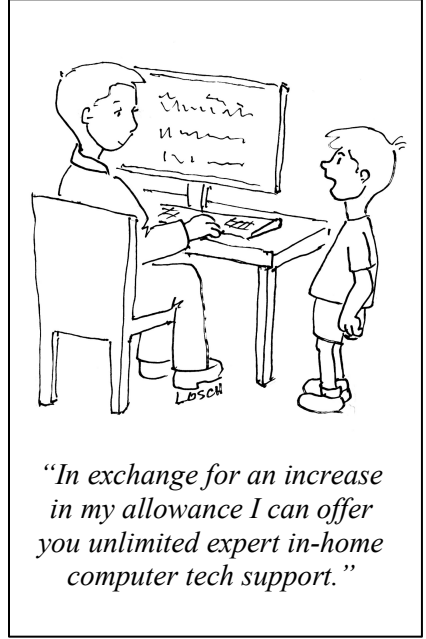
A Touch of Trivia

June is the month of weddings. It is traditional that a bride wears a white gown as a symbol of her purity. This tradition was started by Queen Victoria when she married Prince Albert in 1840. Until that time brides wore brightly colored gowns. Victoria decreed that no one else was to wear white at her wedding, and she ordered the couturier to destroy the pattern of her gown so that no one could copy it. Immediately after her wedding, fashionable brides all over the Empire started wearing white.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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