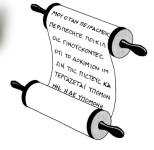


THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



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March 2014

This Month's Cover

This month's cover is Donatello's "The Annunciation," in honor of that feast on March 25. It is a 5½x7' gilded carving in pietra serena. Pietra serena ("peaceful stone") is a hard dark slippery greenish-gray sandstone found around Florence. Brunelleschi and Michelangelo used it extensively for sculpture and for architectural enhancements. This sculpture is one of Donatello's later works, and is one of his first that reflects a new style that he developed after his stay in Rome. The background and pilaster are richly decorated with gold leaf. The work is displayed in Santa Croce in Florence. It was placed near the altar of the Cappella Cavalcanti in Santa Croce.

Donatello's genius is shown in the figures of the carving. Not seen in this detail are six *putti* ("baby angels") who are huddled together with their arms around each other, with facial expressions as if they were afraid of the height. The Blessed Virgin, also startled and frightened by the sudden appearance of the Angel Gabriel, nonetheless stands in a position of modest deference and reverence. Gabriel is equally reverent as he kneels before the Queen of Heaven. Giorgio Vasari, the great 16th century painter and art historian, wrote, "He displayed such skill and facility that, in short, no one could have bettered his design, his judgment, his use of the chisel, or his execution of the work."

Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, better known as Donatello ("Little Donato"), was born in Florence in about 1386. His father was a promi-

nent member of the Florentine Wool Combers Guild. But for his extraordinary artistic talent, which was obviously recognized very early in his life, little Donato would have grown up in his father's trade. He apprenticed in the shop of the great Florentine goldsmith Lorenzo Ghiberti, who would later execute the magnificent gilded bronze doors on the Baptistry in Florence. In 1404-1407 he studied in Rome with Filippo Brunelleschi, the Florentine goldsmith, architect, sculptor and engineer who designed the Baptistry doors and would later design the great dome on the Duomo in Florence. While in Rome, Donatello and Brunelleschi lived the "high life" and despite their talent gained the reputation of being treasure seekers.

Donatello did most of his work in Florence, although he received commissions for sculpture from all over Italy, and was in great demand. In 1443 he was called to Padua by the heirs of the great warrior Erasmo da Narni to execute an equestrian statue of him. This was the first statue of that nature since classic times. The great bronze lost-wax casting still commands the city square in Padua.

He returned to Florence in 1453, but two years later went to Siena, where he did Judith and Holofernes for the Siena Duomo (it was later acquired by the Medici and moved to Florence). He returned to Florence in 1461, and continued to work there until his death in 1466. He is buried in the Basilica di San Lorenzo, near his patron, Cosimo de' Medici.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

It is no secret that I believe abortion to be one of the greatest evils that modern society has inflicted upon itself, and I am aware that there are many who would be more than happy if I would simply shut up about it. Morally, however, I cannot keep silent—that's how evil prospers—particularly in the light of recent developments in Belgium. I have long predicted that once abortion became generally accepted, legalized infanticide would not be far behind. It is here. The Belgian parliament has just passed a bill allowing infant euthanasia. It now awaits King Philippe's signature, which he says he will give. The first reaction might be that this is an act of mercy, as it purportedly applies only to terminally ill infants.¹ How long will it be, however, before it also applies to the mentally retarded, the physically deformed, or those whom the parents or society for some reason deem to be undesirable? This is not new. We have seen it before in the efforts of the Fabians, the Eugenicists, George Bernard Shaw, and Margaret Sanger . . . and of their disciple, Adolf Hitler.

In the past 40 years we have slaughtered over 54,000,000 unborn infants. I shudder to think that among them might have been the scientist who would cure cancer or discover how to grow wheat in the desert; the spiritual leader who could wake us up

and teach us to live in peace; or perhaps the next Leonardo, Shakespeare, Mozart, Beethoven, Locke, Jefferson or Gandhi. Most of those 54,000,000 would also have grown up to become producers, consumers and taxpayers.

What frightens me is that there are so many seemingly reasonable arguments in favor of abortion and euthanasia—as long as we remove from the mix any concern about God's Natural Law or a reverence for the sanctity of human life.² Shaw's argument, for example, was that people "who are of no use in this world—who are more trouble than they are worth" should be killed. From a purely practical and secular point of view, he may be right—but the world under God is not purely practical and secular. Sanger sought to reduce or eliminate the black population because she deemed them inferior and unproductive.³

Every human life is sacred to God, even when we cannot understand what its purpose in his plan may be. It is not for us to challenge his reason for creating a person, for taking one, or for allowing some pain or suffering. We may question and we may wonder, but we may not challenge. Nor may we decide that he is wrong and destroy a life that he has created.

Father Rick Losch

² A leading "pro-choice" advocate recently acknowledged in an interview that a fetus is a human life, and then said, "So what?"

³ She may be succeeding. Over 65% of the abortions performed by Planned Parenthood, the organization she founded for that purpose, are on black women.

¹ A discussion of both sides can be seen at <http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/13/world/europe/belgium-euthanasia-law-children>.

Shrove Tuesday

Our traditional Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper will be held on Tuesday, March 4th, beginning at 5:30 p.m. and ending at 7:00 p.m. The price for adults is \$5.00 and for children under age 12 is \$2.00. Take-out plates will be available. Please invite your friends and neighbors to join us for this traditional Anglican celebration of Mardi Gras.

Hiram Patrenos

Special Lenten Services

On March 5th 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

Ash Wednesday

For those who are unable to attend our noon Ash Wednesday service, the Livingston First Presbyterian Church will have a very brief service of the imposition of ashes at 7:15 a.m.

Richard R. Losch+

Evening Prayer and Parish Supper

We remind you that during Lent we do not have our monthly third Wednesday Evening Prayer and Parish Suppers. We will resume then on Wednesday, May 21.

Richard R. Losch+

ECW 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 for 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 them to our storage space. Please do not leave them in the parish hall.

Hiram Patrenos

Fifth Sunday Service

The Fifth Sunday Community Service this month will be hosted by the First Presbyterian Church on March 30th at 11:00 a.m. Please make your plans to attend and help to continue this unique Livingston tradition.

Hiram Patrenos

Worth Pondering

“Good intentions that are not clothed in reason lead to greater disasters than actions built on ill will.”

Henning Mankell

“Institutions will always try to preserve the problem for which they are the solution.”

Clay Shirky

The Epistle is published monthly except August by Saint James' Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470-0446, the Rev. Richard R. Losch, Editor. Phone 205-499-0968, email loschr@bellsouth.net. Copyright © 2014 R. R. Losch. Permission is granted to reproduce text items in parish newsletters or bulletins (but not on the Internet or digitized) as long as they are reproduced completely and in print, and credit is given.

Be Wordly Wise

Cutting words

A strange variety of words derive from the Latin *caedere* (Late Latin *cidere*), “to cut off.” The past participle of the Latin verb is *caesus* (LL *cisus*) which is also the source of a huge number of English words. To Civil War buffs, one of the first that comes to mind is “secede,” which combines it with the reflexive *se-*, “itself.” Most of the words with the root *-cide* also derive from this, such as “decide” (cut off the argument) and “homicide” (the cutting down [killing] of a man). From *caesus* or *cisus* we get incision, precision, decision, excise, concise, decess, and scissors.

In ancient Rome, the Julian family bore the cognomen Caesar for centuries. It seems to have meant “full head of hair.” Since from the earliest times the Romans scorned long hair on men, a full head of hair would have had to be cut frequently.¹

Although the name Caesar originally came from *caesus* and meant “cut off,” it went in a totally new direction after the time of the Roman dictator Gaius Julius Caesar. Within a hundred years after his death it came to be a title for the emperor. The last

Julian emperor was Nero, although all the emperors thereafter continued to call themselves Caesar. It eventually came into German as Kaiser, and Russian as Czar. It is remarkable, however, to note how many Caesars, Kaisars and Czars were cut down during their reigns.

Richard R. Losch+

Destroying a Temple

In his first letter to the Corinthian Christians, Paul warned: “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple” (1 Cor. 3:17). Paul was referring to the Corinthians’ bickering, which threatened to destroy the church there. It is almost certain that he was referring to an incident that happened over 400 years earlier with which the Corinthians would certainly be familiar.

The temple of Artemis in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was so beautiful that people came from all over the known world just to see it. On July 31, 356 BC, a man named Herostratus walked to the temple and burned it down. He said that he did it in order to make his name remembered for all time. He was condemned to death, and the Ephesian council decreed that in order to defy his wish, his name was never to be written or mentioned again under penalty of death. Unfortunately, the historian Theopompos of Chios recorded the event and identified Herostratus. True to his wish, he is remembered to this day for his arson.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ It is a myth that the cognomen “Caesar” came from Julius Caesar’s having been cut from his dead mother’s womb (thus “Caesarian section”). The family had borne that cognomen for at least 500 years before Caesar was born. He was born naturally, and his mother, the Lady Aurilia, lived to a ripe old age. In fact, Julius Caesar was a very vain man, and was irked that with a cognomen meaning “full head of hair” he was going bald.

Unsalty Salt

The Gospel for the Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany tells of Jesus' teaching, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot" (Matt. 5:13). The first question we might ask is, "How can salt lose its saltiness?" After all, salt is salt.

The Jews were one of the few people on earth for whom salt was not a precious commodity.¹ In most parts of the world it was scarce, and had to be mined.² In Palestine, on the other hand, it was plentiful and easy to obtain. There are vast plains surrounding the Dead Sea that are layered with dry salt. The Dead Sea is saturated with salt (its ancient name was the Salt Sea), and when the wind whips up a spray it dries almost instantly in the hot dry air, and the wind deposits the salt on the land. It is there for the taking. The common practice in ancient times was to pry up blocks of this dried salt and sell them in the marketplaces. People would break off a small chunk and grind it up (it pulverizes easily) and use it to season or preserve their food.

The only problem with Dead Sea salt is that it is not pure sodium chlo-

ride (table salt). It is mixed with many other salts, including a high percentage of magnesium salts that are bitter, but otherwise have little taste. The ancients knew little about chemistry, and none but a few scholars understood the difference between pure salt and mixtures like Dead Sea salt.

Sodium chloride is hygroscopic. This means that it will draw humidity out of the air. This is what causes salt to clump up and make a damp mess in a saltshaker. Sometimes it will even draw enough moisture that it will partially dissolve itself to the extent that it can run out of the block, leaving behind the other salts (this is called deliquescence). If people did not store their salt blocks carefully, the salt would leach out during the humid rainy winter, leaving behind nothing but a friable block of bitter magnesium salts. When this happened they would use the remains either to line the bottoms of their ovens, or they would crumble it up and use it like gravel on walkways—thus it was "thrown out and trampled under foot."

Richard R. Losch+

In Passing

This epitaph was found in a cemetery in England:

*Remember man, as you walk by,
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, so shall you be.
Remember this and follow me.*

To which someone replied by writing on the tombstone:

*To follow you I'll not consent.
Until I know which way you went.*

¹ Salt is necessary for life, and it was also an important food preservative. Our word "salary" derives from the Latin *salarium*, which was a soldier's allowance to buy salt.

² The salt mines were horrible places. They were worked by slaves who had a life expectancy of only a few months.

Saint Patrick's Day

Saint Patrick's Day is not just a popular cultural festival. More importantly, it is a holy day that should be noted not only by the Irish, but by all Christians. He, along with Saints Brigid and Columba, is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland. Until about 40 years ago, Ireland was looked upon as the most firmly established Roman Catholic nation in the world.¹ At least half of the Roman Catholics in the United States today trace their roots back to Ireland.

Little is known about Patrick's life, even including the exact time that he lived. There are two documents that are almost surely written by him. They are his *Declaration of Faith* (Latin *Confessio*), and the *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus* (Latin *Epistola*). In the *Confessio* he tells a bit about his life and work, and since his biblical quotations are from the Latin Vulgate, we know that he lived no earlier than the late fourth century. In the *Epistola* he talks about the Franks, and it is evident from his description that they were still pagan at that time. Their conversion took place in the period 496-508. It is therefore generally accepted that his work in Ireland took place in the 5th century.

¹ In the last 50 years the Church leaders have become shockingly negligent in teaching the Faith. As a result, in a nation where in 1960 90% were regular church-going Catholics, today only about 20% of Irish worship regularly, and a huge number who still call themselves Catholics do not know how to pray the Rosary or even say a "Hail Mary." And before we Anglicans become smug, we need to realize that we are in exactly the same condition.

Patrick (Patricius) was born of Christian parents in Roman Britain, although he was not particularly devoted to the Faith. At the age of 16 he was captured by Irish pirates who carried him off to Ireland and sold him into slavery. During this time he developed greatly in his spiritual life, and after 6 years as a slave he had a vision telling him that if he escaped he would find a ship to carry him back to England. One night he slipped away, made his way 200 miles to the coast, and there convinced a shipmaster to take him on board. After returning to Britain his faith intensified. His experience in Ireland haunted him, and he finally determined to return to Ireland to convert the pagan Irish to Christianity. He convinced Pope Celestine I to send him to Ireland as a missionary. He baptized thousands, and ordained priests to lead the Christian communities that he founded. Since there is no evidence that his ordinations were ever challenged, it may be assumed that Celestine consecrated him a bishop.

Very little is known of Saint Patrick's life and activities outside the two documents mentioned above, yet there are volumes of stories and legends about him. Some may be based on fact through oral traditions, but most of them are fanciful and quite imaginative. Two that are most familiar are his use of the shamrock to explain the Doctrine of the Trinity, and his alleged driving of the snakes from Ireland. He may well have used the shamrock as a teaching tool—it is not unreasonable for him to have done so—but there is no hard evidence of

it. There is also a legend that the devil sent snakes to harass him while he was on a retreat in the wilderness, and he then drove all the snakes in Ireland into the sea. In fact, there is strong evidence that there were never any snakes in Ireland since the end of the last Ice Age. Many of the legends associated with Saint Patrick may have come from the ministry of Palladius, who also was sent by Pope Celestine to Ireland in the early 5th century.

The symbol of Saint Patrick is the shamrock, and his banner is a red X-shaped cross on a white field. This cross is found on the British flag along with the crosses of Sts. George (England) and Andrew (Scotland).

Although Patrick was never officially canonized by any pope, he has been accepted as a saint since at least the fifth century, and has been considered the patron saint of Ireland since that time.¹ The traditional date of his death is March 17, and in the early 17th century that date was standardized in the church calendar as his feast. Today it is honored as a holy day in Ireland, while in most of the rest of the world, while it is a holy day, it is recognized more commonly as a cultural festival. It is said that on Saint Patrick's Day everyone manages to find a little Irish in his ancestry.

Richard R. Losch+

The Glory of God

We use the phrase “the Glory of God” frequently, but do we know what it really means? In the story of the dedication of Solomon’s temple (2 Chron. 6-7), we read, “the priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it” (7:2). There are several Hebrew words for glory, but the one used here and in similar contexts is *kabod Adonai*² (כבוד יהוה). The word *kabod*, usually translated “glory,” can also mean “honor” and is always associated with being heavy. It derives from the verb *lekabed* (לכבד), “to honor,” with the implication of making something heavy (in the same way that we might speak something being profound, which means “deep”). In the Hebrew idiom, then, to glorify something is to make it heavy. In the same idiom, the opposite is *lekalon* (לכלון), “to dishonor” or “to make light” (in the sense that we make light of something unworthy). The word *kal* (כל), “light” (as in not heavy) is associated with shame and dishonor.³

When the temple was filled with the Glory of God, then, the feeling of awe and honor in the presence of God was so “heavy” that the priests could not bear it, and thus “could not enter the temple of the LORD.”

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Until the 11th century, canonizations were generally declared either by a local bishop or by acclamation of the people. It wasn’t until the Middle Ages that canonization became an exclusive prerogative of the Holy See. Today it is a long formal process that carefully examines the life of the proposed saint.

² The actual word is *Yahweh*, the sacred Name of God, but as this was too sacred to be pronounced it was always read as *Adonai*, “Lord.”

³ I do not know if the creators of Superman, who were Jewish, recognized the significance of Superman’s Kryptonian name, Kal-El. In Hebrew it means “God shames or dishonors.”

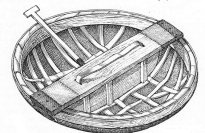
The Babylonian Ark

Ancient legendry is full of epic flood stories, including tales of a hero who built an ark and saved the animals of the earth. The one with which we are most familiar, of course, is that of Noah. Students of ancient literature are also familiar with the 18th century B.C. Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, which was written at least 12 centuries before the writing of the Book of Genesis. It tells of the hero Utnapishtim, who at the behest of the gods built an ark and saved his family and the world's animals, and was rewarded by being made a god. The good god Ea warned him that five evil gods planned to flood the earth. Ea told him to build a ship and save his family and two of every kind of animal on earth. It rained for 7 days and flooded the whole earth. When the rains stopped no land could be seen, but as the waters abated Utnapishtim sent out a dove and then a swallow, each of which returned. He then sent out a raven that did not return, and he knew that there was land. His boat landed on the top of Mount Nimush. The gods then command him and his family to repopulate the earth. The parallels to the Noah story are striking.

Recent archaeological discoveries have found that this is actually a retelling of the even earlier Akkadian Atrahasis Epic, which appears to be the source of almost all the flood stories throughout the Middle East. There is geological evidence that several thousand years ago the Mediterranean may have broken the barrier that separates it from the Black Sea

and flooded vast regions in Anatolia (now Turkey) and Mesopotamia. This flooding was not instantaneous, but spread over the course of several weeks, giving people who heard of it time to prepare by building boats. There were probably several instances of farmers, Noah prototypes, who saved their families and at least part of their herds.

Recently discovered cuneiform tablets include what is called the "Ark Tablet." It is a cell-phone sized clay tablet written on both sides with very small characters. It is essentially a set of detailed plans for building an ark. The god Enki gives Atrahasis instructions on how to build the ark, and he then writes in detail how he built it according to Enki's instructions. It is quite different from what one might expect. Rather than the ship-shaped vessel that we might imagine, it is essentially a huge round basket. A round basket-shaped boat called a coracle is a very ancient style of boat, and is still in common use throughout the Middle East today to cross rivers and navigate small waterways. In fact, it would be the perfect vessel to survive the Great



Coracle

Flood. It is much easier to build than a pointed-prow ship, it is stronger, and it is much less likely to capsize in rough waters. Nautical engineers have proven that a ship built to the specifications of Noah's ark would break up within a few minutes of the time it started to float. A giant coracle, on the other hand, would hold together if properly built. Also, the purpose of

the ark was simply to stay afloat until the waters abated. It had nowhere to go—there was no destination, and no course to navigate. There would not be any need, therefore, for a pointed prow to cut into the waves as the ship moved forward. All that was needed was the ability to stay afloat, and a round coracle would be the best choice for that. Undoubtedly the reason for the ship-shaped ark of the Noah story is that when the ancient oral tradition was finally written down as the Book of Genesis in the 5th century B.C., the kind of vessel that the Israelites were familiar with was the pointed-prow ship that we all know today.

Atrahasis' ark, on the other hand, was a round coracle. However, it was a far cry from an ordinary coracle, which would normally be about 4 to 8 feet in diameter. Atrahasis' coracle was "a field in area" (about 165,000 square feet, with a diameter of 230 feet). Its walls were "10 times 12 cubits in height" (180 feet). He built 6 decks, thus providing it with 7 levels, and pitched the boat with "3 times 3600 units of raw bitumen."

The translators of the Ark Tablet were amazed by the description of how Atrahasis brought the animals to the ark. It says they were brought "two each, two by two." This was written 1000 years before the Genesis story, yet even though the descriptions of the arks are quite different, the descriptions of the animals are the same in both stories.

Recognizing that the Noah story is an outgrowth of earlier such stories does not in any way invalidate its

meaning, nor does it take God out of the picture. God created mankind long before there were any Hebrews, let alone Jews. He did not restrict his actions to the Israelites, nor did he perform his miracles only for them. There is no doubt that in ancient times there was a massive flood that inundated most of the then known world. That it did not engulf the entire planet is irrelevant to the fact that it seemed so to the people of the Middle East. To those few who survived in the midst of a mind-boggling death toll, there was little doubt that they had been saved by the hand of God.

Richard R. Losch+

Forgiveness

Forgiving is an act of sacrifice, and thus an act of self-discipline. When we forgive we yield up to God the bitterness that can destroy us, and the right to exact revenge. Forgiving is not saying that what someone did to us does not matter. Of course it matters—if it didn't, there would be nothing to forgive. If you can forgive and forget, then the offense cannot have been very serious. True forgiveness does not require forgetting, but rather the will to work past the damage and try to heal and rebuild the relationship. Forgiveness also requires effort on the part of the one forgiven. He must also want to atone for his offense and rebuild. When true forgiveness happens, the relationship often becomes stronger and healthier than it was before the offense.

Richard R. Losch+

Mount Sinai

For centuries scholars have argued about the nature and location of Mount Sinai. In the Old Testament it is more commonly called Mount Horeb, although the New Testament always refers to it as Mount Sinai. The mountain called Jabal Musa (Mountain of Moses) on the Sinai Peninsula could be the real Mount Sinai, and is commonly called that by pilgrims. There is no strong evidence in favor of it, however, and it has been commonly accepted as such only since well into the Christian era. There are several mountains in the region that could also be the real Sinai. One argument against it is that the Bible says that “the people saw the thunder and lightning, and heard the trumpet, and saw the mountain in smoke” (Ex. 20:18). This clearly suggests a volcano, but there has been no volcanic activity in that region for hundreds of millions of years. Another suggested location is in Northwest Saudi Arabia, which was the location of the Land of Midian. Since Moses saw the burning bush on Mount Horeb (Sinai) when he was tending his father-in-law’s flocks in Midian, this is a good possibility. That region, however, is also devoid of volcanic activity. The biblical accounts of the wanderings in the wilderness are consistent with most of the possible sites of Mount Sinai.

Recent scholarship has identified another likely location. That is Har Karkom, a steep 2700 foot mountain ridge in the Paran Desert in the Negev in southern Israel. In the past 10 years the Italian archaeologist Emmanuel

Anati has been excavating several sites around Har Karkom. While this is another non-volcanic region, there might be a very good explanation of the thunder, the trumpet and smoke. *Horeb* derives from a Hebrew word that means “collapsing.” Thus *Har Horeb*, “Mount Horeb,” means “Collapsing Mountain.” Fairly regularly, slabs of rock tear away from the sheer face and collapse onto the desert floor. When this happens there is a scream of tortured rock (the trumpet), and the expected thunderous roar of the crumbling rock sliding down the mountainside. This also produces huge clouds of dust that look very much like smoke (recall the massive dust cloud that engulfed lower Manhattan on 9/11). Also, Har Karkom is high enough that it collects a significant amount of moisture from the air in spite of its location in the desert. As a result, there are large regions of low vegetation there. These frequently become dry enough, however, that the slightest spark ignites them and they burn fiercely for a short time. This would also explain the “lightning” and smoke (and possibly Moses’ burning bush). This, along with several other recent archaeological discoveries in the region of the Negev, makes a very good case for Har Karkom to be the real Mount Sinai.

Perhaps we shall never know for sure where Mount Sinai was located, and perhaps we are not meant to. If we do not know, then we cannot turn it into a shrine and venerate the mountain instead of what it represents.

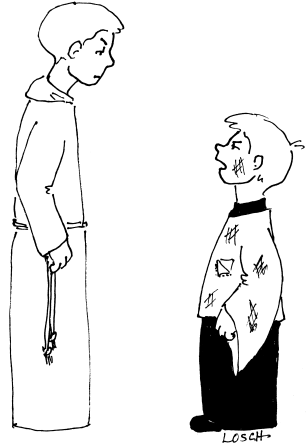
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Don't Forget
 INTERFAITH
 MEN'S
 BREAKFAST
 MARCH 2
 7:45 A.M.
 Mark your Calendar

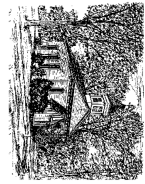
HARDEE'S ON
 WASHINGTON STREET

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



*"It's pretty hard to love your enemy
 when he's such a total jerk!"*



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