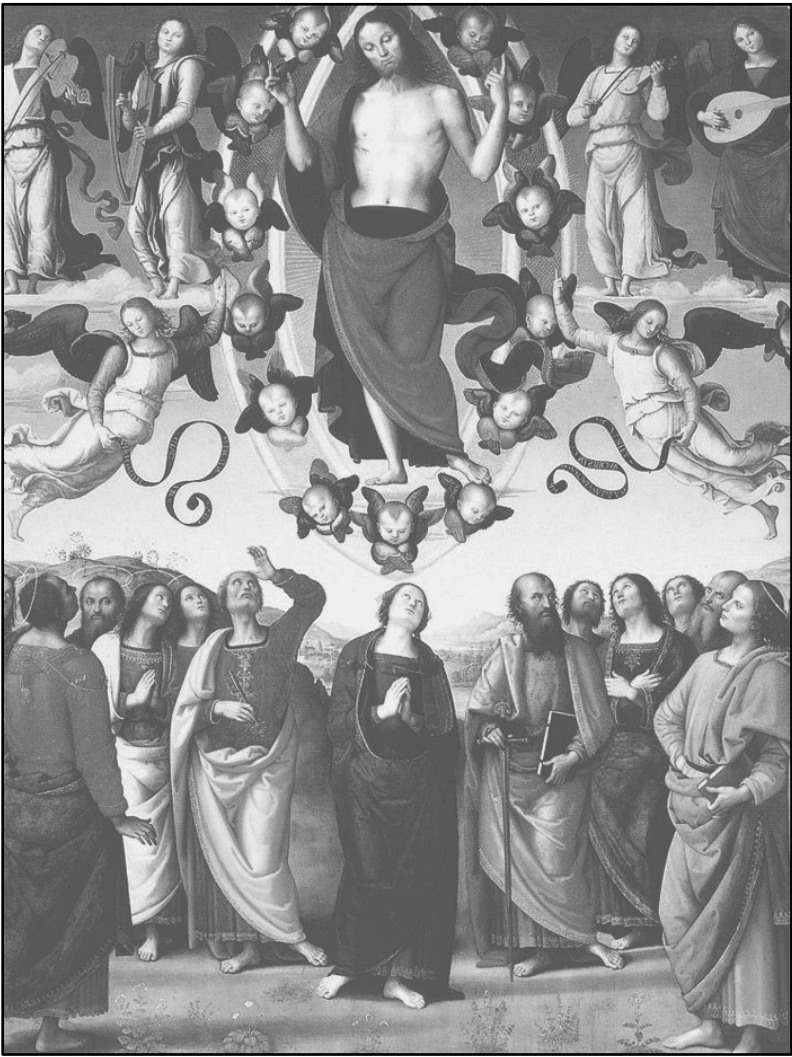


THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

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May 2013

This Month's Cover

Our cover picture this month is *The Ascension* by Pietro Perugino, painted between 1496 and 1498 in oil on a wood panel. It is displayed in the Musée Municipal de Beaux-Arts in Lyon, France. Typical of many Italian Renaissance paintings, it is huge—8½ by 11¼ feet. Unfortunately, our black-and-white rendition fails to show its brilliant colors. In some respects its style looks like a work of an earlier time. The figures are stiff and stylized, although the body proportions are consistent with paintings of the late fifteenth century. This style was taken up by many others, and came to be known as the Umbrian school. In the painting the ascending Christ is surrounded by a full-body halo of the heads of *putti*,¹ and is accompanied by a choir of angels.

Pietro Perugino was born Pietro di Cristoforo Vannucci in 1450 in Umbria, in a town about thirty miles from Perugia. As an adult he took the name Perugino, “Perugian.” He studied first under Fiorenzo di Lorenzo, and assisted Piero della Francesca. In the early 1470s he was a fellow student

¹ These “baby angels” are a vestige of the ancient Roman boy-god Cupid, who was cruel and capricious—a far cry from the childlike innocence that putti are supposed to represent. Cupids were common in ancient Roman tomb sculpture. Renaissance artists used them to represent innocence, and they became very popular, still being used well into the early twentieth century. They are commonly and incorrectly called “cherubs.” The cherubim were actually a Hebrew concept of a class of avenging angels of a terrifying visage.

with Lorenzo di Credi and Leonardo da Vinci in Verrocchio’s studio in Florence.

In 1479 Perugino was summoned to Rome by Pope Sixtus IV to help decorate his new Sistine Chapel.² He worked there with Sandro Botticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio and Cosimo Rosselli. It is hard to imagine such an awesome assemblage of genius in the same place at the same time. From the contracts that have survived it appears that Perugino was the leader of the team. Sad to say, much of this work was destroyed in 1535 to make room for Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*.

Perugino’s Umbrian style of gentle figures with a drooping posture and tilted heads was copied by many later artists, although in his later years he tended to be in something of a rut, dully repeating the same type of figures in painting after painting.

In 1500-1504 Raphael was a student of Perugino’s, and may have helped in his largest (but perhaps not his best) works, the frescoes in the Sala del Cambio in Perugia. In 1506 he retired to Perugia, and continued to work there until his death in 1523. His style, once highly admired, was by that time considered passé in Florence. His early genius had waned.

Richard R. Losch+

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 © 2013 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.

² This was well before the time of Michelangelo, who was only four years old at the time.

A Word from the Editor

The end of April is approaching, and the media feeding frenzy is still in full force as I write this. The third week of April was not a good one. On Monday the Boston bombing took place, and on Wednesday the news came out that letters laced with ricin had been sent to the President and two other politicians. Then that evening a goodly portion of the town of West, Texas was obliterated in the fertilizer factory explosion. Any one of these would have been sufficient to spark a 24-7 news blitz throughout the media, and I am sure the editorial rooms were afire with hot discussions as to which should take precedence. Boston, of course, won. But it is sad to note that in Iraq and Afghanistan in the same week, IEDs and suicide bombers killed and injured dozens of times more people than in Boston and West combined, including several eight-year-old boys, yet there was barely a mention of it in the news. Why?

I am sick of hearing that our apathy to the deaths in the Middle East (or to anything else) is due to racism. I don't think that it is anything more than that they are far away and we don't know them, so it doesn't really "touch home." Also, as Stalin observed, one death is a tragedy, but a thousand deaths is a statistic. Boston won the media frenzy contest simply because West was an accident and the ricin mailer is a lunatic, but in Boston someone from outside the fold attacked us. It is basic human nature to pay the most attention to that.

The problem with this is that as we

mature we are supposed to learn to transcend our human nature. A newborn baby is a paragon of self-centeredness, having no concern for anyone or anything that does not provide for his own needs and wants. It is natural for him to take what he wants whenever he can, and to strike out at anyone who offends him. As he matures he learns to love, to share, to compromise, and to sacrifice. The ultimate in transcending human nature was expressed by Jesus: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). We saw many examples of this among the first responders in Boston and West, who risked their own lives to help others. They didn't stop to ask what they might gain or whether the victims, most of whom were strangers, were worthy. They simply rushed in to help.

It might seem that there is little we can do to relieve the suffering of people on the other side of the world. Donations to relief organizations help, but that is not the most important thing we can do. It is tempting to hear about the bombings, famines and earthquakes and think, "How awful," and then move on to the latest sports scores. A disaster in central China is no less disastrous than one in Massachusetts or Texas, and we should care as much. The most important thing we can do is to stop for a moment and offer a sincere prayer—a sincere one—for the victims and those who try to help them. Never underestimate the power of prayer. *Father Rick Loch*

Gideons' Success

Many of you may remember John Faile from Tuscaloosa. He is the Gideon who visited Saint James' every October for several years. A few weeks ago he was in Africa with a group of twenty Gideons distributing Bibles in an extremely poor Muslim region of Malawi. The Muslim principal of the local elementary school flatly refused to allow them to distribute the Bibles. They prayed for guidance, and soon thereafter the teachers went to the principal and demanded that the children be given the Bibles, because they had no other books to teach them to read. He relented, and now the children's reading textbook is the Holy Bible. "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small; Though with patience he stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all." (Longfellow, *Retribution*).

Richard R. Losch+

Economic Cliff Notes

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the federal agency that was created from Dodd-Frank legislation, issued the definition of a "qualified mortgage" on January 10, 2013. To obtain a mortgage, home borrowers would have to limit their "debt-to-income" ratio to 43%, i.e., a borrower's monthly debt payments cannot exceed 43% of monthly before-tax income. The definition took 804 pages to document (source: CFPB).

Transamerica Capital, Inc.

*All I ask is a chance to prove that
money can't make me happy.*

Evening Prayer and Parish Supper

Our May service of Evening Prayer will be on Wednesday, May 15th, at 6:00 p.m. with a fish fry following in the parish house. Catfish, French fries and hushpuppies will be furnished. Signup sheets for slaw, green salad, deserts and tea will be posted in the parish house kitchen, as well as a sheet for those planning to attend. A contribution based on the number attending will be asked of each person to defray the expenses for this event. As always there will be plenty of good food and fellowship. So that we may accurately plan for this event, you are asked to sign up no later than Sunday, May 12th.

Hiram Patrenos

Sunday School Summer Recess

Our last day of Sunday School for children this school year will be Sunday, May 19th and the last day for adults will be Sunday, May 12th. Sunday School will resume in the fall on the first Sunday after Labor Day. Thank you to our dedicated children's teachers, Ethel Scott, Mary Helen Jones, Michele Luke, and Madelyn Mack, who give their time and energy to make Sunday School available for our children. Thanks also to Fr. Losch for teaching the adult classes.

Hiram Patrenos

*If "con" is the opposite of "pro,"
then Congress must be
the opposite of Progress.*

Forward Day by Day

The new *Forward Day by Day* daily devotional booklets for May, June and July are available in the tract rack in the Parish House. In addition to the small booklets we have large print editions available. Please feel free to take either size.

Hiram Patrenos

Parochial Report Statistics for St. James'

	2011	2012
Total Active Baptized Members	33	26
Total Communicants in Good Standing	26	22
Average Sunday Attendance	22	21
Easter Sunday Attendance	43	23
Total Sunday Holy Communions	50	50
Total Weekday Holy Communions	3	5
Private Holy Communions	0	3
Daily Offices held on Sunday	1	1
Daily Offices & other services held on Weekdays	23	10
Burials conducted	2	1

Parochial Report Statistics for St. Alban's

	2011	2012
Total Active Baptized Members	4	4
Total Communicants in Good Standing	4	4
Average Sunday Attendance	6	9
Easter Sunday Attendance	N/A	N/A
Total Sunday Holy Communions	12	12
Total Weekday Holy Communions	1	1
Private Holy Communions	N/A	N/A
Daily Offices held on Sunday	0	0
Daily Offices held on Weekdays	0	0
Burials conducted	0	0

ECW Yard Sale

The Episcopal Church Women will have a yard sale May 16th - 18th during the Highway 11 Antique Alley Yard Sale. They plan to set up for the sale on the afternoon of Wednesday, May 15th, and to pack everything remaining after the sale on the afternoon of Sunday, May 19th. Everyone is encouraged to keep this in mind as they clean attics, storage buildings, and closets. Furniture is especially sought after during this sale and we will be happy to help you move any items you wish to contribute. If you have items to be contributed, please speak with Hiram Patrenos to make arrangements to get the items to our storage space.

Hiram Patrenos

Men's Breakfast

Our Interfaith Men's Breakfast does not meet during the summer, so the one this month will be the last until September. It will be on May 5 at the Presbyterian Church at 7:45 a.m. We will resume at the Methodist Church September 8, because the first Sunday is on Labor Day weekend. Thereafter we will meet each first Sunday. Our breakfasts are open to all men, so please invite your friends.

Richard R. Losch+

Divine Vacation?

God may have rested on the seventh day, but he doesn't take the summer off. Neither should we. Take a vacation from work if you can, but don't take one from the Church.

Be Wordly Wise

Macabre

This word means “deeply disturbing” or “horrifying,” and is usually associated with death. Its roots go back to an event that took place in Palestine in the second century BC, and which is described in 2 Maccabees 7:1-41. During the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid (Syrian-Greek) oppressors of Judea, seven brothers were captured by the mad tyrant Antiochus IV Epiphanes. While their mother was forced to watch, they were brutally tortured to death one by one in the Temple, and their body parts were fried in the sacred basin before the altar. Finally the mother, who had refused to try to convince her sons to swear loyalty to Antiochus, was also tortured to death. This atrocity so enraged the Jews that they redoubled their efforts, and eventually defeated the Seleucids and obtained freedom for Judea. The story has been retold for centuries, and is referenced in Heb. 11:35: “Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better



Totentanz (Dance of Death) by Michael Wolgemut, 1493

resurrection.” In the Middle Ages it was the subject of one of the many “miracle plays” that were performed in churches to teach Bible stories.

The play was called *Chorea Machabaeorum*, “Dance of the Maccabees.”

In Old French this was rendered *Danse Macabre*, and in time it came to be translated “Dance of Death” rather than “Dance of the Maccabees.” In 1874 the French musician Camille Saint-Saëns composed the very popular tone poem *Danse Macabre*, and writers soon thereafter started using the word as an adjective in its modern sense. It quickly came into English with the same meaning.

“Macabre” is also used as a noun.

A macabre is an art form (usually a sculpture) depicting death in a gruesome and macabre form. Generally a skull is a part of a macabre. The picture on the right is of a



macabre on the tomb of the Habsburg emperor Charles VI in Vienna.

Richard R. Losch+

The Cost of Learning

Annual tuition and fees at an average four-year private college have increased 526% in the last 30 years, which is double the rate of inflation over that time. The average in-state cost for public colleges this year (tuition, room, board and fees) is \$17,860. If the rise had followed the inflation rate, it would be \$7,536 (source: College Board, Department of Labor). Harvard is the most expensive college in America, with a charge this year of \$54,496. It has a \$32 billion endowment (source: Harvard).

Via Transamerica Capital, Inc.

The Staurogram

An ancient symbol of Jesus, focusing particularly on his crucifixion, is the staurogram. This is a combination of two Greek letters, Tau and Rho (T and R, which in Greek are T and P). The name derives from the Greek *stauros* (σταυρος), “cross” and *gramma* (γραμμα), “thing written” or “alphabet letter.” Symbols of this sort were common in ancient times. One of the best known today is the Chi-Rho, a symbol of Christ, which is a combination of the first two letters of *Christos* (“Messiah or Anointed One”) in Greek, CH (X) and R (P). Such combinations of letters as artistic devices were common in ancient times. In fact, King Herod used the staurogram on a coin before Jesus was born, although it is not clear to what it referred. Such combinations, when referring to Christ, are called “christograms.” It was long believed that the Chi-Rho was the first of these, and that all others came later. It turns out that his may not be true.

What makes the staurogram unique in Christian symbolism is that it is the only christogram in which the letters are used for their shape rather than for their meaning as alphabetical letters. There is no doubt that Jesus was crucified on a T-shaped cross rather than on the traditional Latin cross that is found in most churches today. On the Way of Sorrows he carried the cross-piece, not the entire cross—Flavius Josephus tells us that the upright remained in the ground, and was used over and over again. The condemned

were brutally treated before they were crucified, and very few would have been strong enough to carry the entire cross to the site. The staurogram, therefore denotes the Tau (T-shaped) cross, and the top of the Rho (P) denotes Christ’s bowed head.

Many scholars believe that the early Church avoided images of the crucifixion until the fourth or fifth century. All cultures considered crucifixion to be a shameful death, and the Jews believed that anyone who was crucified was cursed by God (Deut. 21:23). This was a stumbling block to the conversion of many, especially Jews, so it was believed that early Christians emphasized the Resurrection and shied away from the Crucifixion. Until recently the strongest argument against this was Paul’s frequent focus on the crucifixion, and it is now clear that Paul’s letters were widely read in the early Christian community long before the Gospels were even written.

Recent discoveries of early second century Christian papyri show the use of the staurogram as a representation of the Crucifixion.

This is two centuries earlier than scholars previously believed crucifixion symbols to be used in early Christianity, and is at least contemporary with the first known use of the Chi-Rho, if not earlier.



Richard R. Losch+

Religious Feasting Through the Ages

Food is essential to life, so it is not surprising that so many social, historical, legendary and religious events involve a meal of some kind. One of the first things we do when we invite someone into our home is to offer something to eat. A party without food would be unthinkable, and basic to the planning of any important celebration is to consider the food and how it is to be served. Similarly, one of the central aspects of strict self-discipline is fasting in order to strengthen internal spirituality.

Many Bible stories are set in the context of a meal, from Abraham's feeding of the angels who came to reassure him of God's promise (Gen. 18:5ff) to Jesus' parables likening the Kingdom of Heaven to a banquet (Matt. 22:2 et al). Jesus' first miracle, the turning of water into wine, was at a banquet (John 2:1ff). Of course, the meal that first comes to the Christian mind is the Last Supper, in which Christ gave us the sacrament of his Body and Blood, the Holy Eucharist.

Ancient life was centered around meals even more than life in Western culture today. Even in our culture the dinner table was the center of the family until family life began to dissolve in the latter part of the last century. The average Jew in ancient times spent more of his worship time in the home than in the Temple or in shrines,¹ and this worship usually in-

involved a meal. In Biblical times ritual feasts were a means of worshipping deities, establishing social relationships, confirming patron-client hierarchies, and conferring honors. Romans as well centered their worship around meals. A sacrifice was offered in the temple to feed the god, then the meat from the sacrificial animal was fed to the people in a sacred communal banquet in the temple. Some of the sacrifice was sold—this rather than the regular markets was the main source of the food that the Romans ate. This was a problem for Christians, who were not to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:1ff).

Communal banquets were an integral part of religious life throughout the ancient world. The Jews would have no trouble understanding the symbolism of the messianic promise in Isaiah 25:6, "In this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people ... a feast of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined." At the Exodus the Israelite slaves were commanded to prepare a meal and eat it together. Since that time, in one form or another, the Passover has been observed with a meal. The usual Passover meal today is the Seder, which in its modern form is rooted in traditions that followed the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.²

¹ There was no such thing as a synagogue until after the return from the Exile in the late sixth century BC.

² Judaism as it is practiced today is called Rabbinic Judaism. It is in many ways quite different from the Judaism practiced by Jesus, which in turn was different from pre-exilic Judaism. The central beliefs have remained unchanged, but rituals, traditions and forms of

In primitive pagan and idolatrous religions, even the gods had to eat in order to survive. The main responsibility of the priests in the ancient Mesopotamian temples was providing food for the gods. Without food the gods would die, but long before they were starved they would impose such catastrophes on mankind that to fail to feed them was unthinkable. If man through neglect or rebellious hubris failed to feed the gods, he would be destroyed and replaced by another creature who would. Every ancient religion except Judaism (and possibly Atenism for a brief time in Egypt¹) believed that the gods were capricious and amoral, and that they despised man or at best tolerated him. They allowed him to exist only as long as he served them. Abraham was the first to understand that God is righteous and holy, loves mankind, and expects man also to be righteous and holy.

To ancient idolaters, the statues of the gods were living avatars of the gods, and needed to be fed, clothed, bathed, and cared for. When a new

worship have varied greatly over time.

¹ A century or so after the time of Abraham, Akhenaten, Tutankhamen's father, became Pharaoh of Egypt. He believed in one god, Aten, who was loving and righteous and expects man to be the same. He abolished the polytheistic Egyptian religion and established Atenism as the official religion of Egypt. When he died (probably by assassination), the old religion was restored, although Atenism survived for at least a century as an underground religion among intellectuals and the elite. Many scholars believe that Atenism may have had an influence on the young Moses when he was being educated in Seti I's palace.

idol had been carved, it was transformed to a living deity by an elaborate ritual known as the "Opening of the Mouth." The idol was ceremonially washed and clothed, and then a meal was prepared for it consisting of choice meats, honey cakes, fruit and beer, as well as a basin of water for it to wash itself after the meal. This ritual made it become a living deity to be worshiped and served.

Primitive religions believed that their gods actually lived in their temples, specifically in the material of their altars.² The very earliest altars were simple stone cairns. The blood of the sacrifices was allowed to soak into the cairns as food for the god, and burnt sacrifices were burned directly on the altar so the god could have easy access to the food. In time it seemed appropriate to shape and adorn the altar, usually from a single stone. It would be carved and adorned outside the temple, then dedicated by a complex ritual in order to prepare it for the god to take up residence in it. This practice began in the Neolithic era, when the only means of carving stone was with harder stone. With the discovery of metals, most ancient religions continued building altars with only stone, using no metal tools. This was in fear of injuring the god with

² By classical times the Greeks and Romans no longer believed this. They believed that the gods lived on mountaintops, but visited their temples frequently and could always hear the prayers and see the offerings of their worshipers. They also believed that the statues and talismans of the gods had a magical quality that enabled people to communicate with the gods these images represented.

the metal tool and thus angering him.

Well before the building of Solomon's Temple in the late tenth century BC, the Jews had developed a far more sophisticated understanding of God. They recognized that he did not actually eat the sacrifices (Ps. 50:12f), and that he lived only symbolically in the tabernacles and shrines. That symbolism was so powerful, however, that many of the ancient primitive customs were still observed, even though the primitive theology behind them had long been discarded. When Solomon built the Temple, there were no metal tools used on the site. The stones were all shaped and numbered in the quarries and the timbers and paneling finished in the forests of Lebanon, then these materials were transported to Jerusalem where they were assembled using only wooden tools (1 Kg. 6:7).

Since the Jews believed blood to be the life of the animal, their sacrifices focused on returning to God the life that he had given. They were fully aware that God does not eat the blood, yet the traditional allegory of feeding him was still strong. In the same way, they symbolized God's providence to man as a banquet in which God feeds us. The Christian hymn, "All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee" is completely consistent with the Judaic understand that everything comes from God, including life, and we return to him what was actually his all along.

Blood was the sealing token of every covenant with God, particularly the Mosaic Covenant (the "Old Tes-

tament"), which was sealed with a sacrifice at the foot of Mount Sinai in which Moses sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on the people (Ex. 24:8). This was preceded by the sacrificial Passover meal that the Israelites ate on the night that they escaped Egypt, having smeared the blood of the sacrifice on their doorposts to mark them as God's people. Today Jews celebrate the Mosaic Covenant annually at Passover with the sacred meal of the Seder. This feast celebrates the liberation from Egypt which culminated in the Covenant at the foot of Sinai.¹ The form of the feast evolved over three millennia, although its modern form began sometime near the end of the Talmudic Period in Jewish history, around 600 AD. The dietary laws for Passover are more rigid than for the rest of the year. Many Jews who are generally quite liberal in their observance of them follow them strictly during Passover. The format of the meal is very structured, following several steps from the opening ritual washing of the hands to the final farewell, "Next Year in Jerusalem." It involves dipping vegetables into salt water (representing tears); eating matzo, a crisp unleavened bread representing the unleavened bread eaten on the night of the escape from Egypt; drinking red wine symbolizing the blood smeared on the doorposts; eat-

¹ The foundation of the Covenant is the Torah, which is the basis of the whole Mosaic Law. The giving of the Torah, symbolized by the giving of the Ten Commandments, is celebrated in the fall at the feast of Simchat Torah.

ing charoset, a pasty mixture of fruits and nuts representing mortar; eating bitter herbs representing the bitterness of slavery; and eating roasted lamb signifying the lamb that the Israelites ate on the night of the escape. The youngest boy asks four questions about the ceremony,¹ and the story of the Exodus is retold. One of the important parts of the ritual is the blessing and partaking of wine and unleavened bread several times. Also, a place is always set at the table for a stranger—no stranger should ever have to be alone at Passover.²

The Christian Covenant (the “New Testament”) was sealed with the sacrificial blood of Christ on the cross, preceded with his establishment of the Blessed Sacrament at the Last Supper: “This is my blood of the new testament” (Matt. 26:28). Although the Last Supper took place at the time of Passover, most scholars agree that it

was almost definitely not the Seder. There were several ritual meals associated with the Passover, especially in preparation for it. If it were the Seder, that would mean that Jesus was crucified on the day of the Passover, yet the Bible tells us that the priests were anxious to have the bodies off the crosses before Passover began (Jn. 19:31). Notwithstanding, these preparatory feasts involved the eating of unleavened bread and wine. They were associated with the selection and preparation of the lamb that would be sacrificed for Passover, emblematic of the lambs that the Israelites sacrificed and ate at the Exodus. This is significant, because Christians teach that Christ was the final sacrifice for the remission of human sin—“the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29). This is why one of the ancient symbols of Christ is the Paschal (Passover) Lamb.



When the Resurrected Christ arrived in Emmaus with the disciples who did not recognize him, they sat down to a meal. Immediately “he was known of them in the breaking of bread” (Lk. 24:35). It is through the sacred meal, which we now know as the Blessed Sacrament, that we know him and are spiritually fed. This is the “daily bread” for which he taught us to pray—not the food on our table, but the holy food on the altar, through which we can truly know him, and which truly sustains us.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ (1) Why is it that on all other nights during the year we eat either leavened bread or unleavened bread, but on this night we eat only unleavened bread? (2) Why is it that on all other nights we eat all kinds of vegetables, but on this night we eat bitter herbs? (3) Why is it that on all other nights we do not dip [our food] even once, but on this night we dip twice? (4) Why is it that on all other nights we dine either sitting upright or reclining, but on this night we all recline?

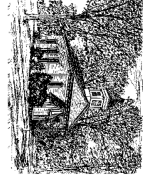
² I had the privilege and joy of being a guest at my friends' Seder table many times several years ago. The first time I was there I asked my friend, “Doesn't it seem strange to have a Christian priest at the Seder table?” She replied, “We're required to set a place for a stranger, and I can't think of anything stranger than a Christian priest.” I miss those friends.

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch

Don't Forget
 INTERFAITH
 MEN'S
 BREAKFAST
 MAY 5
 7:45 A.M.
 Mark your Calendar

LIVINGSTON FIRST
 PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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