

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



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December 2017

This Month's Cover

This month's cover, in honor of the Feast of Saint Nicholas of Myra on December 6, is Mladen Mikulin's statue *Sveti Nikola Putnika* (Saint Nicholas the Traveler) in the Baška Voda harbor in Croatia. Unlike most of our covers, this is a modern work, erected in 1998.

In the 4th century A.D. what is now Baška Voda was a part of Anatolia, most of which is now modern Turkey. An important Anatolian city not far from Baška Voda was Myra, of which St. Nicholas was the bishop (317-343).¹ Many cities in that region are dedicated to him as their patron saint. Contrary to the common image, Saint Nicholas is not a mythical character. He loomed large in early Church history, and played an important role in the suppression of the Arian heresy. Tradition has it that in 325 he was temporarily expelled from one sitting of the Council of Nicaea for punching Arius, the founder of the heresy, in the face. Many legends surround Saint Nicholas, some being quite imaginative and fanciful. He is the patron saint of many things, including the city of Baška Voda. Because he traveled extensively, often by sea, he is the patron saint of sailors and ship passengers. He is also the patron of schoolboys and unmarried young women (Saint Lucy of Sicily, December 13, is the patron of schoolgirls). Contrary to the modern misunderstanding, he is not the patron of moneylenders or of thieves. His association with Christmas and his eventual transformation into Santa Claus is relatively modern (see the article below on Santa Claus).

Mladen Mikulin (1958-) is a Croatian sculptor who burst

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¹ Today scholars disagree about the exact location of Myra, although they know generally where it was.

upon the international scene in 1981 with his marble bust of the musician-poet Jim Morrison.¹ Morrison's grave in Paris was tawdry at best, and Mikulin believed that he deserved better. He placed the sculpture on the grave, but the site was subsequently defaced and the sculpture stolen. Nonetheless, it achieved worldwide attention, and Mikulin's career was launched. He was accepted to the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, from which he was graduated in 1986. He has since produced many sculptures, including several grave monuments. His Morrison work was in marble and he has worked in other media as well, but he prefers to work in copper on a steel frame. The statue of *Sveti Nikola Putnika* is cast in bronze.



Richard R. Losch+

A Word From the Editor

For some reason people have long been fascinated by criminals and outlaws. Billy the Kid, the James Gang, and Bonnie and Clyde were legends in their own time, and Vito Corleone and Tony Soprano, although fictional, represent the pre-Gotti Mafia for which many hold a secret mischievous admiration. I believe that the reason for this is that they represent something that our modern society has lost.

Throughout most of its history Western culture has held a rigid moral code that was primarily based on Judeo-Christian principles. Although in most of the history of our culture people have failed to live up to that moral code, they were well aware of it and knew when they were violating it. It could be described as a mainly immoral society, in that it knowingly violated its own moral standards. In the past few decades our society has moved from being immoral to being clearly amoral. An amoral society is one that has no clear moral standards, deeming what moral principles it does possess to be relative

¹ Mikulin was 13 when Morrison died in 1971, and he was an avid devotee of Morrison's rock group, The Doors.

rather than absolute. For example, I recently read of a survey that was done among high school and college students. They saw nothing wrong with cheating, because in their terms, it didn't hurt anyone else. They respected clever cheaters, and held in disdain those who were clumsy enough to get caught. The law means little anymore. Tax cheating is the norm, government corruption is rampant, and the quickest way to get cursed out on a highway is to go the speed limit or below. Sexual morality has all but disappeared in a large segment of our society, particularly among the young. Lying and "spinning" have become acceptable standards in political life, and if a promise or obligation is not secured with a carefully worded legal contract it has little or no meaning. Trusting a handshake or a verbal promise is a thing of the past.

I believe that this is why we secretly admire the likes of Vito Corleone. His "family" had a rigid moral code, and was expected to live up to it at the risk of life and limb. It was a code that had much about it that most people disapprove of, but it was nonetheless a well-defined one that was strictly obeyed and swiftly punished if violated. Many people today long for such firm standards—for principles that we can hang onto and use as guides to our conduct and thinking.

I won't deign to try to explain why or how we have come to the amoral state in which we now find ourselves, but as Christians it is a state that merits our attention and concern. I also have no quick solution to the problem, but I can propose a start. As the ancient Chinese adage goes, a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.¹ That first step is to learn the teachings of the Church—disagree with them if you must, but learn them—and establish a defined moral code by which to live, then try to live by it. You can't "wing" morality. Seek standards, pray about them, meditate on them, and endeavor to live by them. God will help you.

Father Rick Losch

¹ The original adage, ascribed to Lao-tzu, is "A journey of a thousand *li* starts beneath one's feet." I knew you would want to know that.

Be Wordly Wise

Merry Christmas

The word “merry” has some very interesting etymological roots. It comes from the Middle English *mirie*, “pleasant,” which derives from the Old English *mirhth*, “mirth.” That in turn comes from the Gothic and thus Gaelic *maurgjan*, “to shorten.” *Maurgjan* is also the root of our words “margin” and “merge.” Apparently the implication is that brevity is generally pleasant. We are reminded of the adage, “Brevity is the soul of wit.” A merry Christmas, then should be a short and pleasant one (not one that begins before Hallowe’en).

The word “Christmas,” as most people know, comes from “Christ Mass.” In Middle English the names of many Christian holy days were a merger of the name of the saint or event and “-mas”—Michaelmas, Lammasmas, Stephenmas, etc. “Christ” derives from the Greek *Christos* (Χριστος) and thus the Latin *Christus*, “anointed one” or “Messiah.” “Mass” is from the Old English *moesse*, “Mass.” The origin of this is disputed, but most believe that it is from the Vulgar Latin *missa*, a past participle of *mittere*, “to send.” The dismissal in the Latin Mass is “*Ite, missa est*,” “Go, it is sent” (often given the unfortunate translation, “Go, Mass is over”).

Richard R. Losch+

Thank You, Deep South Landscaping

Thanks to Jason Gordy and his workers of Deep South Landscaping for their gift of giving and planting the winter flowers in the prayer garden and for pruning and cleaning up the shrubbery. We appreciate their hard work and generosity!

Hiram Patrenos

Sunday School Schedule

Sunday School will meet each Sunday through December 17th but will not meet on December 24th or December 31st.

Hiram Patrenos

Annual Parish Meeting

Our Annual Parish Meeting will be held on Sunday, December 3 immediately following the 11:00 a.m. service. Reports of parish organizations will be made and two new Vestry members will be elected to replace Hiram Patrenos and Madelyn Mack, whose terms expire December 31. Mr. Patrenos and Ms. Mack will not be eligible for re-election to the Vestry for one year.

Other members of the Vestry are Jim Rankin and Rosalie Dew whose terms expire on December 31, 2018, and Joe More and Mary Helen Jones whose terms expire on December 31, 2019.

To be eligible for nomination and service on the Vestry, one must:

- be an active confirmed communicant in good standing at St. James' (communicants' names are printed in bold type in the parish directory);
- be frequent and regular in worship attendance;
- support the work of St. James' by an annual pledge to the operating budget;
- be willing and able to attend Vestry meetings and perform the work expected of a Vestry Member. (Vestry meetings are normally scheduled after Sunday services on an "as needed" basis.)

Hiram Patrenos

Christmas Flowers

Each year St. James' Church offers the opportunity to remember loved ones through donations to the Altar Guild, which provides poinsettias and other decorations in the Church for Christmastide. If you wish to make a donation for this –In Memory of, In honor of, or In Thanksgiving for – envelopes with forms are available at the back of the Church or you may print this information clearly and mail it along with your contribution to Carolyn Patrenos, President, St. James' Altar Guild, P.O. Box 399, Livingston, AL 35470. Checks

should be made payable to St. James' Altar Guild. Because of the increased costs for these flowers and decorations, we ask for a minimum donation of \$40.00 for memorials. The publication deadline for inclusion in the Christmas bulletin is Wednesday, December 20th. Your donation is tax deductible.

Hiram Patrenos

Special Services for Advent and Christmas

On Thursday, December 21st at 1:00 p.m. the Altar Guild and volunteers will prepare the Christmas decorations to be put in the church following the morning services on Christmas Eve. Volunteers should be sure to bring their hand clippers and gloves, and to wear casual clothes.

On December 24th, the 4th Sunday of Advent, at 11:00 a.m. we will have as our service the "Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols" as developed and celebrated at King's College, Cambridge annually since 1918. This service was adapted from an Order drawn up by E.W. Benson, who was later Archbishop of Canterbury. Immediately following this service we will complete the decoration of the church.

Our celebration of Christmas will begin later that evening with our traditional Christmas Eve Mass at 5:30 p.m. Father Losch will be the celebrant and our nursery will be open for this service. Immediately following the service we will have our parish Christmas party in the parish house. You are asked to bring your favorite hors d'oeuvre and your favorite wine to share.

Hiram Patrenos

Community Fifth Sunday Service

The Fifth Sunday Community Service this month will be hosted by the First Livingston Presbyterian Church on December 31st at 11:00 a.m. Please make your plans to attend and help to continue this old Livingston tradition.

Hiram Patrenos

Every Member Canvass

We have begun our Every Member Canvass. Pledge cards are available on the table at the rear of the Church. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James'. The Vestry needs this information so that it can budget appropriately for the upcoming year. If you have any questions regarding our parish finances, please do not hesitate to speak with a member of the Vestry or our Treasurer, Roy Underwood. Pledge cards are available on the table at the rear of the church and may be placed in the alms basins or mailed to St. James' Church, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James', its mission and work and return your card no later than Sunday, December 10th.

Hiram Patrenos

Wilmer Hall Christmas Contribution

St. James' will be making a special gift to Wilmer Hall for its Christmas needs this year. Last year because of your generous contributions, we were able to contribute \$1,000 and we hope to be able to make that same gift this year or perhaps an even larger one. Envelopes are available on the table at the back of the Church and contributions should be made payable to St. James' and designated for "Wilmer Hall Christmas." Envelopes may be placed in the alms basins or given to Hiram Patrenos. So that we may forward our contribution to Wilmer Hall in time for use this Christmas, the last day for making a contribution is Sunday, December 3rd.

Hiram Patrenos

"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+

Authority and Power

One of the most telling things about a person's character is the way he treats those over whom he has authority and power, particularly animals and inferiors. Anyone who has no compassion for the suffering of an animal is very unlikely to have any for that of another human. This is borne out by the statistic that the majority of mass murderers and serial killers started out by torturing animals. I have heard people defend animal abusers on the grounds that God ordered man to "rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen. 1:28). Their argument is that if God subjected animals to our rule then we have the right to use them as we wish. Such an attitude displays not only an appalling lack of understanding of Scripture, but even more a shocking lack of humanity.

Being given the power to rule does not guarantee that one will do it well. A good ruler is one whose prime focus is on the welfare of those over whom he has been given authority. The ruler whose focus is on his own power, comfort and legacy rather than on his subjects' welfare is at best a bad ruler, and at worst a despot. This is equally true of everything from rulers of nations to people in authority in businesses, organizations, government agencies, and even in families and in diner-waiter relations in restaurants.

Any authority that we may have, regardless of how much or how little, comes to us from God. Pilate said to Jesus, "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus replied, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (Jn. 19:11). Although Pilate's authority may have come to him *through* the emperor Tiberius, it, as well as Tiberius' own authority, ultimately came from God. When we consider this we have to realize that the bearing of authority is a great responsibility for which we will be held accountable. The primary part of that responsibility is concern for the welfare of those over whom we have authority. This is true whether it is authority over an empire, a business, a classroom, a family, a servant, or even

over a pet or a wild animal.

As we have often pointed out, the definition of love is a conscious and conscientious concern for the welfare of others. This, unlike liking someone, is an act of will, not an act of emotion. We cannot control our emotions, but we can control our will. This is why Jesus, although it is unreasonable to command us to like one another, can command us to love one another. Authority, being a gift of God's love, must be wielded in love. That is an act of will, and thus abuse of authority is a failure to try to do the will of God, and is sin. Peter said, "Fear God. Honor the emperor" (1 Pet. 2:17). It is the ruler's God-given authority, not the man, that we are to honor.

In recent years, various types of privilege, including "white privilege," have been much in discussion. The very term privilege implies a level of authority, and thus of responsibility. I admit that as a white middle-class exurban American Christian raised in the mid-20th century, I have had a far easier life than most people in the world, and for that I thank God. I am grateful for it, but I am not ashamed or guilty for it. This by its very nature has given me a level of authority that I would not have had if I had been born in another time or place. If I abuse that authority and take arrogant pride in that privilege, I would then have every reason to be ashamed and guilty—not for having received the gift, but for my abuse of it. The power that comes with privilege can be used either to enhance that privilege selfishly, or to extend it in order to help others reach a state of privilege of their own. To do the former is sin, and to do the latter is virtue. It's our choice, and ultimately we will have to answer to God for the choices we make.

If we are blessed with power and authority, which we all are to some degree, we must consciously seek to use it well, and pray that God will guide and help us to do so.

Richard R. Losch+

The next time you catch yourself thinking that it might be fun to have lived in an earlier era, just remember that commercial toilet paper was not invented until 1857, and was not in widespread use until the end of the 19th century.

Here Comes Santa Claus

The old Christmas song says, “Here Comes Santa Claus,” but we might better ask, whence came Santa Claus in the first place? Santa Claus as we know him today is the invention of the Columbia College professor Clement C. Moore, the cartoonist Thomas Nast, and the story-teller Bret Harte. In 1823 Moore wrote the classic Christmas poem *A Visit From Saint Nicholas* for his children. He based the “jolly old elf” on two rather disparate characters, Saint Nicholas of Myra and the Teutonic god Odin. The name Santa Claus does not appear in the poem, and in fact did not exist until 45 years later.

Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of schoolboys, and on his feast, December 6, it was traditional to give gifts to schoolboys. The day for schoolgirls was a week later on December 13, the Feast of Saint Lucy of Sicily, the patron of schoolgirls. Over the centuries both feasts tended to merge together and move toward the major December gift-giving feast, Christmas. In the process Saint Lucy somehow disappeared from the traditions. The image of the modern Santa Claus was completed when the New York cartoonist Thomas Nast published his drawing of Saint Nicholas in *Harper's Weekly* on January 3, 1863. Up to that time pictures of St. Nicholas had usually depicted him as a tall thin man, generally in modified bishop's robes. Nast was clearly influenced by the description of “Saint Nick” in Clement C. Moore's poem.



Saint Nicholas (A.D. 270-346) was the Bishop of Myra in what is now southern Turkey. There are countless legends about him, but one of the most famous tells of how he saved a man from having to sell his three daughters into slavery in order to pay his debts to thieves who had cheated him. Nicholas dropped three bags of gold down the man's chimney, providing him with the means to pay his debts and save his daughters. The three gold balls on a pawnbroker's shop represent those three bags of gold. Another version of the legend is that the father did not have any money for a dowry for his

daughters, so they were doomed to remain unmarried (a perilous state for a girl in those days). For this reason St. Nicholas is the patron saint of unmarried young women. Both versions of the story say that the bags fell into the girls' stockings that had been hung by the fireplace to dry. This is the origin of the Christmas stocking. Another legend of St. Nicholas tells of an evil butcher who killed three little boys, planning to mix their flesh with his meat. Nicholas learned of it in a vision, had the butcher arrested, and miraculously brought the three boys back to life. This is why he is the patron of schoolboys.

Santa's red suit was also a result of the poem. It was based on the red gown traditionally worn by bishops. The style of the suit, including the fur trim, boots and cap, is that of the winter clothing worn by many men in the far northern European countries. The pipe and pot belly were creations of Moore, as was the bag of gifts. St. Nicholas was associated with gift giving because of the gifts of the bags of gold and his traditional generous ministrations to the poor. This was why gifts were given to schoolboys each year on his feast.

The other figure that Moore drew upon in his poem was a rather unlikely one—the Teutonic god Odin or Wotan, the king of the Germanic gods. On the night of the Winter Solstice, Odin rode through the skies searching for great heroes who had been killed in battle during the past year. He brought them to Valhalla, the banquet hall of his castle, where they would feast with the gods forever. He was accompanied by a demon, Schwarz Piet (“Black Pete”), who sought out and slew cowards. Odin's annual ride was on his eight-legged steed Sleipnir. This was Moore's inspiration for the eight reindeer. Reindeer are commonly used to pull sleighs in the north countries, and the number eight was based on Sleipnir's eight legs. Brave boys and girls would wait up on that fearful night in hope of seeing Odin. Because Sleipnir got tired on that hard ride, they would leave sugar or hay in their shoes to refresh him. If they had been good (brave), Odin would thank them by leaving gifts in their shoes. If they had been bad (cowardly), Schwarz Piet would leave a lump of coal in their

shoes. On Christmas Eve Santa rides through the night sky seeking good children, for whom he leaves gifts. This is clearly reminiscent of Odin's ride seeking brave heroes. In the Germanic countries children still leave their shoes out with candy or hay for the reindeer, hoping for gifts in return, and Schwarz Piet still accompanies *Vater Weihnacht* ("Father Christmas") to leave lumps of coal in the shoes of the bad children. In most other countries nowadays, children hang their stockings instead of leaving out their shoes.

The Dutch name for Saint Nicholas is Sint Nikolaas, but in the Netherlands and Belgium he is better known by a corruption of it, Sinter Klaas. He was so known by descendants of the Dutch settlers of New York (originally New Amsterdam). Many people of Dutch ancestry moved west with the Gold Rush in 1849, and they continued moving west as pioneers during the western expansion. They brought with them their legends, including their Christmas traditions. In 1868 Bret Harte, the chronicler of the Old West, wrote a short story called "How Santa Claus Came to Simpson's Bar." He had heard the many stories told by the Dutch from the east, and was familiar with the name Sinter Klaas. He apparently had never seen it written, however, so he spelled it the way it sounded to him—Santa Claus. Santa Claus was now complete. St. Nicholas was the inspiration, Clement C. Moore gave him a description, Thomas Nast gave him a picture, and now Bret Harte had given him a name.

Richard R. Losch+

God So Loved the World

Judaism and Christianity are the only two major religions that focus on the concept that God loves his creation. Islam, for example, identifies people and things that Allah loves or hates, but nowhere in the Qur'an is there any statement that he loves his whole creation or even that he loves mankind. Also, in Islam there is no statement to the effect of what Saint John says, "God is Love" (1 Jn. 4:16). To Jews and Christians, however, this is the essence of our faith.

The Torah commands, “Love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5). Jesus quoted this (Matt. 22:37), and also commanded that we love one another (Jn. 13:34). God commanded that we love him, and Jesus commanded that we love one another—but how can an emotion be commanded? The answer is that it cannot. Love, as it applies to God and as he applies it to us, is not an emotion, it is an act of will. While liking is an emotion that cannot be commanded or controlled, loving is an act of will. It is a conscious decision to be faithful, loyal and true.

English is one of the richest languages in the world, but it is weak when it comes to words for love. Unlike many other languages, we have very few of them.¹ In the New Testament, the word that we translate as love in the Matthew and John passages is a verb based on the Greek *agape* (ἀγαπή), which means unconditionally loyal affection—Christian love. The Hebrew word in Deuteronomy is *ahav* (אהב).² There is no question that this is the word that Jesus used and that John had in mind when he used the Greek equivalent.³ There is no accurate English equivalent of *ahav*, so the best we can do is to use the word love. *Ahav* is a verb that is based on the word for fidelity or loyalty.

Fidelity and loyalty are acts of will, and they require that you make yourself aware of the needs and wants of the other person. They do not require that you like him, although if we are truly faithful and loyal to someone we often find that we do eventually come to like him as well. Whether we do or

¹ It is said that the language of a culture reflects what is important to it. Inuit (the language of the Eskimos) has over 30 words for ice. The Greeks had four major words for love—*agape* (divine love), *philia* (brotherly love), *eros* (familiar love—not just sexual), and *storge* (love of children and animals). There are also at least twelve other related words for various types and degrees of love. English has very few.

² Ironically, this is the name of the evil King Ahab, Jezebel’s husband, who was hardly an example of love.

³ Jesus and John spoke Aramaic, not Hebrew, but the two languages are very similar, and *ahav* means the same in both.

not, however, we can still choose to love (*agape, ahav*) him. Consider the parent of an obstreperous and rebellious child. A good parent may hate what the child does and at least at times not even like the child, but he still loves him. And because of that love, he will discipline the child. Similarly, God loves us. He may hate our sins, but he still loves us and, like a good loving parent, he will discipline us.¹

As God commands that we be faithful and loyal to him, so also is he faithful and loyal to us. He is always as good as his word, and we can trust what he tells us. We may not like it and we may not understand it, and because of that we may even occasionally become angry with him. Notwithstanding, if we discipline ourselves to love him—to be faithful and loyal to him—he will always do the same for us.

Richard R. Losch+

The Defilement of a Temple

Lachish in northern Judah was religiously the second most important city in ancient Judah, but by the 8th century BC it had become severely corrupted by paganism. King Hezekiah (r. 715-687) instituted a program of reforms, including the defilement of the pagan temples as an act of contempt for their gods. We read in 2 Kings 10:27. “Then they demolished the pillar of Baal, and destroyed the temple of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day. A recent archaeological dig in Lachish uncovered a pagan temple, and right in the holiest place, where the statue of the god would have been situated, they found a stone seat with hole in it that is clearly a latrine.

Richard R. Losch+

“It is well that war is so horrible, lest we become too fond of it.”

—Robert E. Lee

¹ He does not in this life reward the good and punish the bad (that is a childish and heretical concept), but he will sometimes allow us to get into some very serious difficulties in order to “get our attention” and encourage us to shape up our lives, and thus to strengthen us.

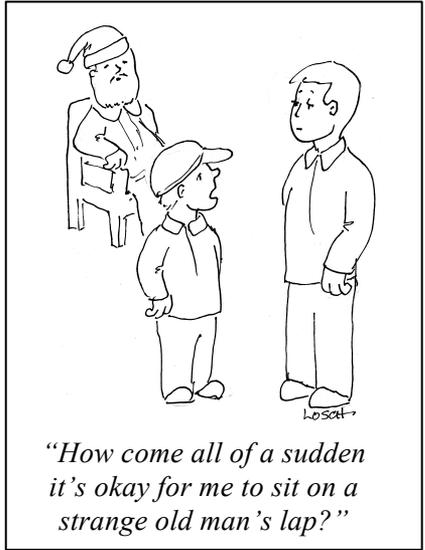
A Touch of Trivia

Calvin Coolidge, the 30th President of the United States, was known as “Silent Cal” because he was famous for being a man of few words. He said, “If you don’t say anything, you won’t be called on to repeat it.” He hated the telephone, and refused to use it to conduct presidential business. He loved to play practical jokes—for example, he once hit the “red button” to summon his bodyguards, and then hid under his desk.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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