

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

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May 2020

This Month's Cover

The cover painting this month in recognition of Ascension Day (May 21) is *The Ascension* by John Singleton Copley. It in oil on canvas, was completed in 1775, and measures 2'8"x2'5". Although it was painted in England, is on display in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Copley's birthplace.

Forty days after the Resurrection Jesus told his disciples to remain in Jerusalem and wait "for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). They did not understand at that time, but they did ten days later when they received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. After his teaching he was physically taken from them as he ascended into Heaven in his Resurrected Body.

John Singleton Copley (1738-1815) was born in Boston to a family of successful Anglo-Irish tobacco merchants. His talent as a painter was recognized early, and his parents were able to give him the best training available in the Massachusetts Colony. Unfortunately, there are no surviving records of his boyhood or art training. He built a strong career in New England as a portrait painter of the wealthy, and associated socially with many of the powerful leaders of the colonies. He had also established a good reputation in London, which was enhanced considerably in 1766 when his painting *A Boy with a Squirrel* was displayed there and became immensely popular. It depicts his young half-brother playing with a squirrel. Copley realized that his potential was at least as great in England as in the still relatively primitive colonies. Civil unrest began to rise in Massachusetts in the early 1770s, so he decided to leave there as tension increased between the Whigs and Tories. In 1774 he moved to London, and never returned to America. Notwithstanding, one of the main centers in Boston, Copley Square, is

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named after him and is graced with his statue. While in England, although he still specialized in portraits, he also did a few religious paintings. In 1810 he was seriously injured in a fall, and was unable to paint. He became severely depressed as his health continued to fail. This was exacerbated by the fact that since he could no longer paint and he had not handled his finances well, he was falling deeper and deeper into debt. In 1815 he entertained U.S. Ambassador to Britain John Quincy Adams, and both rejoiced in the peace and military alliance that had been established between the United States and the United Kingdom after the War of 1812. On August 18, 1815 Copley had a paralytic stroke followed by another a few days later, and he died on September 9. He is buried in Croyden, Surrey, highly respected in both the United States and Great Britain.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

I have heard many people postulate that the CoViD-19 pandemic is a modern-day plague sent by God to punish the world for its apostasy and immorality. I have also heard allegedly intelligent people say that it is an angry nature's revenge for our poor stewardship of our Mother Earth, but I relegate that kind of paganism to the stone-age tribes of the rainforest. In the light of the Old Testament, however, the question of whether God sends plagues, wars or natural disasters to punish us is a good one. Since a loving and just God would not punish the innocent along with the guilty, my answer to that question is a simple no. He told Abraham that he would not destroy Sodom if even ten righteous people could be found there, and when there were not even ten found he arranged for the handful of righteous to leave the city before its destruction (Gen. 18:16ff). On the other hand, the plagues visited on the Egyptians seem to have been sent by God (Ex. 9:14). My answer to that will certainly not satisfy Biblical literalists, but it is nonetheless that God does not punish the righteous along with the sinners, and I cannot accept that all the Egyptians who died in the plagues were

grievous sinners. I am not an “Old Testament Christian” who believes that we are bound to the letter of the Old Testament. It is, after all, the *Old Covenant*, which is replaced by the *New Covenant* in Jesus Christ. We are bound by the spirit of the Law, but no longer by the letter of the Law. Neither are we bound to a literal interpretation of the events of Israel’s history, but rather to an interpretation of them in the light of God’s will, his plan, and his purpose as revealed by the Holy Spirit.

God does not send pain, suffering or disaster to his people, either to individuals or to nations. In this life he does not punish us with pain, or reward us with prosperity. He does, however, allow these things, even to those who do not deserve them. The Book of Job makes this patently clear. God permits pain to happen to the righteous and prosperity to the evil, because to interfere with them would be to interfere with the freedom that he has given to us. That freedom, along with life and reason, is among his greatest gifts to us. What matters, and what will ultimately be punished or rewarded, is not what happens to us in this life, but how we respond to it. This current plague has brought out in some people their worst traits of selfishness, greed and thoughtlessness which might otherwise have never been seen in them. On the other hand, it has also brought out in even more people their best traits. We have seen sacrifice, compassion, generosity and heroism in people who before this plague seemed to be just average and unremarkable people.

Did God send this pandemic to punish us? I do not think so. He allowed it to come into the world, but he did not cause it. He will also bless us with the wisdom, strength and courage to deal with it, and will allow this evil to generate strength and goodness in us that we might otherwise not have had. I do have a great fear, however. I fear that if we continue to abandon God and even turn against him, he will withdraw his blessing and protection, and allow our destruction, as he did with Israel and Judah in ancient times. That is to be feared far more than any plague, and we must pray fervently that he will continue to be our shield and defense.

Father Rick Losch

Sunday YouTube Homilies

Each Sunday and major hoy day during this “lockdown” I will post a brief homily on YouTube. It will usually be on either the day’s Gospel reading or on the significance of the holy day. You can access it on Facebook on the page “St. James’ Episcopal Church” (the apostrophe is important to get the right page). There will also be a “clickable” link in Hiram’s Sunday email notices, right under the list of that Sunday’s readings. You can also see it on my webpage at www.rlosch.com. Click on the “Sunday Thoughts” tab just over my picture. We will continue this at least until the churches are re-opened.

Richard R. Losch+

Suspension of Services and Activities

Bishop Sloan has continued the suspension of all public worship and gatherings through Sunday, May 17th in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Please continue to pray for our country and leaders and those who are sick and those who care for them. At this time of crisis prayers are especially needed. On Sunday mornings we will be e-mailing the Propers along with the “Forms of Prayer to be used in Families” from the Book of Common Prayer, 1928. These offer a simple traditional form of worship for individuals and families in the home. Additionally, there will be a link to a brief homily by Fr. Losch on YouTube. You are encouraged to maintain your spiritual life and your Sunday observance by the reading of these Propers and gathering your family together for prayers and watching/listening to Fr. Losch’s homily. Booklets with these Forms of Prayer are available on the table in the back of the church. The church is open daily for prayer and meditation from 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

Hiram Patrenos

America is the only country where it takes more brains to calculate the taxes on your income than it does to earn your income. —Ronald Reagan

Forward Day by Day

The new *Forward Day by Day* daily devotional booklets for May, June and July are available on the table in the vestibule/narthex and 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

All Things Come of Thee

“All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee. Amen” We appreciate all who have sent their offerings during this time of no formal church services. Checks may be mailed to:

St. James' Episcopal Church or
P.O. Box 446
Livingston, AL 35470
ATT: Treasurer

St. Alban's Episcopal Church
c/o P.O. Box 1422
Livingston, AL 35470

Hiram Patrenos

The Epistle is Online

The last seven 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. Losch+

When Did Jesus Rise?

A common mistake when reading the Bible is to insert our modern values and concepts into an ancient society that often had very different ones. For example, we are obsessed with time and precise time measurement, even to the point that our smart watches and phones are accurate to the microsecond. In Jesus' time, on the other hand, time was very imprecise and no one worried about minutes or seconds. An hour was about a sixth of the time from sunrise to meridian (when the sun is at

its highest). Thus “the sixth hour” meant noon, even though the length of an hour varied with the season. Summer hours were longer than winter ones.

In the prophecies and accounts of the Resurrection there are three expressions used, all meaning the same thing: “on the third day,” “in three days,” and “after three days.” If we inject our modern usage into these expressions, then Jesus could not have risen early Sunday morning. He was buried on Friday afternoon, and three days from that would be Monday afternoon. The ancients, on the other hand, cared little about time precision. They would have heard any of those three expressions and have counted them as Friday, Saturday and Sunday—three days. The fact that it went from late Friday afternoon to early Sunday morning, which we would consider a day and a half, would have been irrelevant to them. It spanned over three calendar days, and that was close enough.

Richard R. Losch+

Wordly Wise

Here am I

Of all the great patriarchs and prophets in the Old Testament, five stand head and shoulders above the rest: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel and Isaiah. It is interesting that these five all have one thing in common that is found in none of the others. When God called them, each answered with the same words, “Here am I.” In Hebrew this is a single word, *hineni* (הִנְנִי). While its literal translation is, “Here am I,” or “I am here,” in the Hebrew idiom it implies much more than that. It was the standard answer of a totally faithful servant when his master called. It has an implication of steadfast loyalty, unquestioning obedience, and a readiness to do instantly the will of the one who called. When the angel Gabriel announced to the Blessed Virgin Mary that she had been chosen to bear the Incarnate Son of God, her answer was, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Although the Gospel was written in Greek, there is no doubt that

Mary, who spoke Aramaic, also answered, “*Hineni*.”¹ This word is particularly significant because it is spoken by God himself. Those who are willing to serve God faithfully, he in turn will serve faithfully when they call upon him in time of trouble: “You will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I (*hineni*)” (Is. 58:9).

Richard R. Losch+

Hell (Part I)

Countless volumes have been written on the theological, spiritual and mystical aspects of Hell, so an article such as this cannot begin to delve completely into the subject. Notwithstanding, since it is a subject that is much avoided these days because it is uncomfortable and politically incorrect, we want to share some basic thoughts about it.

At least in Western Civilization, when the average person hears the word Hell, the first thing that pops into his head is an image of a fiery pit where grotesque demons eternally torture damned sinners as punishment for their earthly transgressions. While this may be an effective metaphor for frightening unrepentant sinners to repent and strive for virtue, it is a theologically inaccurate and overly simplistic picture.

The name Hell is cognate to hole (cavern), and derives from the Anglo-Saxon *helan* or *behelian*, to hide. In ancient Teutonic mythology, Hel was the goddess of the underworld, which was also called Hel. It was the repository for all dead souls except warriors who fell bravely in battle. They went to Valhalla, the banquet hall of Odin’s palace, where they feasted forever. Hel was equivalent to the Greek Hades, which was also ruled over by the god Hades.

From the beginning of humanity, height and light have been associated with good, and depth and darkness with evil. To this

¹ Aramaic and Hebrew are closely related languages, and *hineni* means the same and has the same implications in both. St. Luke says that Mary answered, “*Idou*” (Ἰδοῦ, “Here,” Lk. 1:38). The Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew) always translates *hineni* as *idou*.

day we speak of high values and low morals, and of bright ideas and dark thoughts. Likewise, every religion's concept of the place of ultimate good is high and bright and above the clouds, and the concept of the place of death or evil as a place low and dark, usually beneath the earth. The gods lived above the clouds or on mountaintops, while evil beings ended up in deep chasms or in the bowels of the earth. Those religions that believed in reward or punishment after death had the virtuous souls either turned into gods or brought to where the gods live to remain with them; there was a place in the underworld that was an even deeper pit where the wicked were punished.

Evidence of early burial rituals indicate that as early as the Pleistocene Epoch (the time of the Neanderthals), people believed in some form of afterlife. We know that since the beginning of recorded history (about 3000 B.C.), and unquestionably long before that, virtually every religion in the world believed in some form of afterlife, and most believed that there was significant everlasting reward for the outstandingly righteous, and significant everlasting punishment for grievous evildoers. In these religions the average person, however, simply spent the rest of eternity in some kind of passive "holding tank." For example, in Greek mythology all the dead went to an underworld ruled by Zeus' brother Hades, and that place eventually itself came to be known as Hades. This was neither Heaven or Hell as we think of them, but a place where their disembodied spirits existed in an almost passive, barely self-aware state. Psychologists call it a limbic or hypnagogic state, and it can be described as that state you are in when you are just falling asleep: you are neither awake or asleep, and are just barely aware of your own existence. The ancients believed that in this underworld there was a deep chasm called Tartarus, where grievous sinners were fully self-aware and were punished, some by eternal torture, and others by being given extremely onerous tasks that they could never finish. Another section of Hades was a beautiful place called Elysium or the Elysian Fields. This was reserved for the unusually righteous and virtuous souls, who lived there fully self-aware and in eternal happiness and bliss. Originally

the only souls who could go there were outstandingly brave warriors, and women who died giving birth to sons who eventually would become great warriors. In later Greek mythology anyone who was unusually virtuous could also go to Elysium. Early Christians, in trying to convert pagan Greeks, explained Heaven and Hell by likening them to Elysium and Tartarus. The primary Roman religion, which reflected that of the Greeks, had very similar beliefs.

Until a couple of centuries before Christ, Judaism's concept of the afterlife was not unlike that of the Greeks. Their concept of Sheol (שְׁאוֹל) was quite similar to the Greek Hades except that most Jews did not believe in places of eternal reward or punishment. After the return from the Babylonian Exile (6th century B.C.) there was an increasing belief that in Sheol there was a place where the wicked were punished, and one where the righteous were rewarded, making the concept of Sheol even more like that of the Greek Hades. Most Jews, however, believed that virtue is rewarded and sin punished in this life. When they saw good people suffer they assumed that they had committed some serious sin that no one knew about, and when they saw evildoers prosper they rationalized it by saying that they must have done something so good that it outweighs their obvious sins. The Book of Job clearly denies this thinking, but it nonetheless prevailed even up to Jesus' time. He was asked what sins the people had committed who were slaughtered by Pilate when they were offering sacrifice, and those who were killed when a tower fell on them (Lk. 13:1-5). Jesus denied that either of these things happened directly because of the sins of the victims. He frequently spoke clearly of Heaven and Hell. In fact he talked about Hell more often than about any other subject, including Heaven.¹

Part of Jerusalem is in the Valley of Hinnom, which runs right beside the Temple Mount. Before David captured the city and made it his capital (in about 1000 B.C.) a pagan Canaanite

¹ Those who say that there is no Hell and yet are quick to cite Jesus on other topics would do well to note that.

tribe called the Jebusites lived there. They worshiped a god named Moloch, whom they propitiated by sacrificing their first-born infant sons by throwing them alive into a raging fire. These sacrifices were made in the Valley of Hinnom right beside Mount Moriah, where the Temple would later stand. The spot, needless to say, was an abomination to the Jews. In Hebrew the name of the place is *Gehenna*. It eventually became the city dump, and among other things thrown there was the animal dung that was daily swept up from the city streets. Dried dung burns, so Gehenna was a filthy, stinking and constantly smoldering pit, alive with vermin, particularly rats and maggots. The bodies of dead lepers were thrown there as well. During Roman occupation if a crucified man were still alive as the Sabbath approached, his legs would be broken so that he could not escape, and he would be thrown alive into Gehenna (John 19:32).¹ It was indeed a Hell of a place, maggot-ridden and fiery, that Jesus described as a place “where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched” (Mark 9:48). Gehenna was the source of the image of Hell being a place of fire. It was sometimes the bogey-man used to threaten disobedient children: “If you don’t behave, we’ll send you to Gehenna.” It is easy to see how this grew into “If you don’t behave, God will send you to Hell.” The image of a fiery Hell was much enhanced in a great deal of early Medieval art, and finely polished by Dante Alighieri in *Inferno*.²

(Part II next month: *The Christian view of Hell*)

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Normally crucified victims’ bodies were left on the cross until they rotted off or were eaten by scavengers. The Romans had no respect for the Sabbath. Nonetheless, in Judea they found that it was not worth the problems that arose from angering the Jews by leaving bodies on the crosses over the Sabbath, which the Jews considered blasphemy.

² In Latin *infernus* means nether world (it is cognate to *inferior*, lower). The Italian *inferno* means the same. Because of Dante’s poem the word *Inferno* came to mean Hell in the modern sense. According to Merriam-Webster, the first known use of *inferno* to mean a raging fire was in 1834.

The Sin of Pride

It is often said that the love of money is the root of all evil, but that is not entirely true. It may be the root of much evil, but the sin that is behind all other sin, from the fall of Lucifer to original fall of man, is pride. The ancient legend says that God said that eventually even the angels would bow down before mankind. The highest of all the angels, Lucifer (whose name means Light Bearer) refused to accept this and rebelled. His pride brought about his destruction and eviction from Heaven. Whether you take the Genesis story literally or allegorically, it was also pride that brought about the fall of mankind. When the serpent¹ told Eve that God did not want them to eat the forbidden fruit because it would make them like gods, it was the pride of both Adam and Eve that led them to disobey God's command and eat it.²

Pride is the root of all evil. The only reason that we love money is that it gives us power to control material things, and that in turn gives us power over other people. That lust for comfort and power is rooted in pride. If we look at the Ten Commandments, it is pride that leads us to violate any of them. Theft is the pride of thinking that you have more right to someone else's possessions than he has. Murder is thinking that you have more of a right than someone else (and ultimately than God himself) to decide whether someone should live or die.

The commandment to honor your father and mother is not just a command to respect your physical parents. In the Hebrew idiom it means to honor and respect all who have authority over you. The sin of pride brought Original Sin into the world, and

¹ Christian tradition identifies the serpent with Satan, but Genesis does not. Genesis gives no indication that the serpent was anything more than just that—a troublemaking serpent.

² Tradition has laid the blame primarily on Eve, but this is neither accurate nor fair. Adam was every bit as guilty as Eve, because he was totally complicit in her sin. If you read the story carefully it becomes quite evident that Adam was standing right there beside Eve when the serpent was talking to her, and that he did absolutely nothing to stop her.

Original Sin, the original rebellion against God's authority, is what inclines all of us against any authority. This includes not only the authority of our parents and teachers when we are young, but also that of government and the Church when we mature. This is not to say that we should not stand up against authority when it is abusive or evil, but we had better be very sure that it is truly abusive or evil before we rebel against it. When something rubs our nature or our tastes the wrong way, that does not necessarily mean that it is wrong or evil. It is not beyond possibility that it is actually we who are wrong, but our pride does not want us to accept that. That refusal to accept responsibility for our own actions and to submit to authority is one of the key factors in the decay of modern society.

Overabundant pride is one of the major contributors to the divisiveness in our politics and society today. The same is true in the Church. It is pride that leads us to think that we have the wisdom and insight to be able to seclude ourselves with a translation of the Bible and discern the truth about what God is telling us in it. Such individual prideful rebellions are what led to there now being some 43,000 different Christian denominations.¹ It took many great minds in many councils over many centuries to begin to understand and hammer out definitions of the doctrines of the Apostolic Faith revealed on Pentecost. This also leads to another manifestation of the sin of pride, which is believing that we are the only ones who have it right, and everyone else is wrong (and probably going to Hell). It also takes shameless pride to look at the beautiful traditional liturgical expressions of the Church and say, "I would like it better done another way, so I'll just take it upon myself to do this differently." This has led to many liturgical expressions that belong more on Broadway or on the Gong Show than at the Altar.

¹ Even within the supposedly monolithic Eastern Orthodoxy there are over 50 disparate groups, many of whom do not acknowledge the validity of the others. Bishop N. T. Wright says that if Saint Paul were to come back today, the thing that would shock him most about the Church is not that it is so disunited, but that so few Christians seem to care that it is disunited.

There is one emotion that we call pride that is not a root of sin, and that is the pride we take in others. When a child does some generous or altruistic act, or on his own makes a great achievement, we rightly say that we are proud of him. This is not a sinful pride, but a healthy appreciation of someone else's accomplishment. In fact, although we call it pride, it is actually just the opposite. It is humility, because it is taking pleasure in someone else's achievements rather than in our own. Almost anything that brings us to look beyond ourselves is good.

Pride, they say, goes before a fall. It did indeed go before the fall of Lucifer and before the fall of mankind, and if we allow it to enter our own lives it will go before our own fall. Our greatest danger is when we let pride destroy our own righteousness. The Pharisee in Jesus' parable was, by all usual standards, a good man (Lk. 18:9ff). He obeyed God's law to the letter, and then some, but he destroyed all the benefit of that righteousness by his pride. He said, "Thank you, God, that I am not as other men," and then proceeded to remind God of how much better a man he was than the publican behind him. The publican, on the other hand, acknowledged his failings and put his full trust in God's mercy, saying, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." He went home justified, and not the Pharisee.

Pride is a natural human failing, and thus one on which we must always be on guard. Just as the serpent appealed to the pride of Adam and Eve to destroy them, so can the devil appeal to our own pride. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

Richard R. Losch+

CoViD-19

I have seen in a number of places that the COVID stands for Chinese Originated Viral Infectious Disease, and it was the 19th and first successful attempt at gene splicing the virus. This is totally untrue. The name CoViD means **CORONA VIRUS DISEASE**, and the 19 denotes that this particular mutation of the virus was

discovered in late 2019. The name was coined by WHO (the World Health Organization) on February 11, 2020. CoViD-19 is one of many types of corona viruses, the virus type that causes influenza. They are called corona viruses because their surface looks like a crown (Latin *corona*).

Richard R. Losch+

The Number of the Beast

There is little doubt that the beast in the Book of Revelation refers to Nero (Rev. 3:18). Nero was the first major persecutor of Christians, and in the first century A.D. he was looked upon by many, particularly by Christians, as we look on Hitler or Stalin today. Gematria is the practice of assigning numbers to words in order to discern their mystical meaning, and it was commonly practiced by ancient Jews. Each letter of the alphabet is assigned a number. The values of the letters are totaled, and that is the value of the word. Revelation says that the number of the beast is 666. In Hebrew Nero Caesar's name is *Neron Qesar* (נרון קסר), $(50+200+6+50)+(100+60+200)=666$.

The question then rises as to why in some texts of Revelation the number is identifies as 616 instead of 666. While Nero's name in Greek and Hebrew is *Neron*, in Latin it is *Nero*. If we use the Latin form of his name the *n*, whose value is 50, is dropped, making the total 616. Since Nero was a Roman, using the Latin form in some of the Western texts was reasonable.

In ancient Christian mysticism the number of the beast did not refer to Satan, but to the Antichrist. The Antichrist is a human used by Satan to try to destroy the work of Christ, and who will try to substitute himself in place of Christ before the Second Coming. Theoretically there could be several Antichrists. Many early Christians saw Nero as an Antichrist, and that is the implication in Revelation. Some people have tried to identify notorious monsters such as Hitler or Stalin as Antichrists.

Richard R. Losch+

*Most of the time the best solution to a problem is
nothing more than plain common sense.*

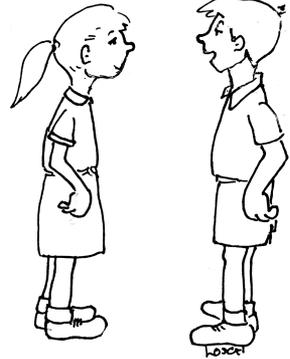
A Touch of Trivia

Lonnie Johnson, a NASA system engineer on the Galileo mission to Jupiter and the Cassini mission to Saturn, spent his evenings tinkering with his own inventions in his home workshop. His work accounts for 6% of all U.S. patent applications. After several prototypes of a high-powered water gun, in 1990 he introduced one of the most successful toys of all time, the Super-Soaker. It was instantly popular and is still selling wildly. In the past 30 years the Super-Soaker has reaped more than \$1 billion in sales.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



“My piano teacher is very religious. Three or four times she put her face in her hands and said, ‘Oh, dear Lord!’”



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