

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

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June 2021

This Month's Cover

In recognition of the Feast of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist (June 24), our cover is *Saint John the Baptist Preaching in the Wilderness* by Anton Raphael Mengs. Completed in the mid 1760s, it is oil on canvas, measuring 4'10"x7', and is displayed at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, TX. This is one of two paintings of the same subject by Mengs. The other was done in 1775 and portrays a much more wild-eyed looking John. Both are in approximately the same position and both bear the cross-shaped staff that is John's traditional symbol.

Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779) was a German painter who worked primarily in Dresden, Rome and Madrid. Although he worked at the height of the Rococo period, he was one of the earlier developers of the Neoclassical school. He was born in the Kingdom of Bohemia, the illegitimate son of Ismael Mengs, an unexceptional Danish painter who had settled in Dresden. His full sister Therese and his legitimate half-sister Julia were also noted painters. Ismael and his wife raised Anton and Julia in their own household along with their mother Charlotte Bormann, his housekeeper, with whom he had had a long affair and eventually married. He was noted as a brutal man who beat his children frequently. Needless to say, young Anton was raised in a tense environment.

In 1741, when Anton was 13, Ismael moved the family to Rome, where the boy continued to study painting under his father, but sought instruction wherever he could find it in the large art community there. His talent was recognized, so it was not hard to find artists who were willing to help him. His



Mengs' 1775 John

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reputation spread, and in 1749 he was appointed First Painter to Frederick Augustus, the Elector of Saxony. Even so he continued to spend as much time as possible in Rome, where he married Margarita Guazzi, one of his models. He converted to Roman Catholicism, and in 1754 was appointed director of the Vatican painting school. While there earned recognition as a Master Painter. In 1749 Mengs accepted a commission from the Duke of Northumberland to paint a full-sized oil-on-canvas reproduction of Raphael's Vatican fresco *The School of Athens* in his London home.¹ He worked on it from 1752-55. The painting is now in London's Victoria and Albert Museum. On two occasions he went to Madrid on commission from King Carlos III. His last trip to Spain was in 1777, when he returned to Rome. Despite his success and fame, he lived in very poor circumstances, as he supported his twenty mainly illegitimate children, seven of whom were eventually pensioned by the King of Spain. At least it is to his credit that he supported them rather than abandoning them. He died in Rome in 1779.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

The Faith was given to mankind in order to change us, not in order for us to change it. That does not mean that the Church should never change—it has undergone massive changes over the centuries—but what it does mean is that there is a basic core of doctrine and morality that is not in any sense dependent on the likes or dislikes of a particular culture or generation, and that core is rock-solid and immutable. Even though we generally tend to resist any kind of change, there are innumerable aspects of church activity that are quite open to change if we think there is a good reason to do so. For example, it is tradition, and not God's law, that we use purple for Lent and white for Easter. While no individual parish has the authority to

¹ That must have been quite a house. The dimensions of *The School of Athens* are 16.4'x25.2'.

change that, the Church can at any time decide to change it to brown and yellow if it decides that that would be more meaningful (although I can imagine the screams of dismay if they do). So too with language. Whether we have the services in Greek, Latin, English or Bantu has no effect on the truth of God's Word, and liturgical languages have often changed over time. On the other hand, there are many teachings and moral standards that have been the mainstay of the Church from the beginning, and are not subject to change. There are many things on which we can bend, but there are also many that are so firm that as Tevye said, "If I bend that far, I will break."

One of the great errors in the Church today is the heresy of Modernism. Pope Pius X called it the Synthesis of All Heresies. It is the idea that the Church should modify its teachings to fit contemporary secular society's values and morals. In effect this means that the Church must teach nothing that is offensive to those outside the Church. This has led to what has been called the "Church of Nice," a spineless creature that embraces whatever liturgical fad that might seem clever at the moment, including pagan rituals. Worse, it turns a blind eye to such mortal sins as infanticide, sodomy and rampant adultery. This does not mean that the Church can condone hatefulness. Condemnation of a sin is for the sake of trying to reform the sinner, not to destroy him. Jesus forgave the prostitute, but he also told her to go and sin no more. He forgave sins, but at the same time made it clear that he did not condone them. Many dislike the idea of "hate the sin and love the sinner," but it is nonetheless valid.

What this all boils down to is how we as individual Christians respond. We are the Church. We can either sit back as the Church of Nice and say, "I don't want to discomfort anyone or embarrass myself," or we can stand up for what we know is right and speak out against wrong. The latter can be uncomfortable and even dangerous, but Jesus never promised that it would be otherwise. If we ask ourselves, "What would Jesus do?", then we had better be prepared to do it.

Father Rick Losch

Parish Directory update

We will be updating the Parish Directory during June and will publish the updated Directory July 1, 2021. Copies of the are available in the vestibule. Please review the Parish Directory and give any additions or corrections *in writing* to Hiram Patrenos or e-mail them to him at patrenoj@bellsouth.net.

Altar Flower Volunteers

Volunteers are needed to provide Altar Flowers through the Pentecost season. A sign-up chart is located on the bulletin board in the vestibule. You may use flowers from your yard or if you wish, make arrangements with a florist to provide them. Florist flowers may usually be used for two Sundays. For more information, please speak with Carolyn Patrenos.

St. Alban's Building/Preservation Fund

Thank you to everyone who has responded so generously to our requests for gifts for our Building/Preservation Fund. As many of you are aware, building costs and material costs have increased astronomically over the last few years and are continuing to do so. We have preliminary estimates for replacing the present shingle roof with metal. If we were replacing the roof today, it would cost up to \$30,000.00 and could be higher depending on what is uncovered when the existing roof is removed, and what repairs might have to be made. We have a long way to go, but because of your gifts we have at least made a good start. If you wish to make a donation for this –*In Memory of, In honor of, or In Thanksgiving for* – or if you simply wish to make a gift, print this information clearly and mail it along with your contribution, payable to St. Alban's Episcopal Church, c/o Hiram Patrenos, Treasurer, Post Office Box 1422, Livingston, Alabama 35470. Gifts of \$100.00 or greater will be memorialized on a plaque which will be placed in the church. For more information, please contact Hiram Patrenos at patrenoj@bellsouth.net or (205) 499-0506.

Hiram Patrenos

Be Wordly Wise

Hapax Legomenon

This expressing should be in the vocabulary of anyone who (a) wishes to impress people at cocktail parties or (b) is content to be a language nerd. Its plural is *hapax legomena*, and it is often shortened to just *hapax* (plural *hapaxes*). It is a Greek phrase (ἅπαξ λεγόμενον) that is translated “said once.” A hapax legomenon is a word or expression that is used only one time in an entire body of literature. For example, in the 256,052 words in *Moby-Dick*, Melville uses the word “matrimonial” only once. It is thus a hapax legomenon.¹

This might seem to be a rather arcane subject until we realize that there are 3,465 hapaxes in the New Testament,² and about 1500 in the Old Testament, of which over 400 are words found nowhere else in any ancient Hebrew literature.³ This can be a serious problem when it comes to translation. We can often figure out the meaning of the word from its context or by analyzing its probable roots, but there are times when the best we can do is guess. It is less of a problem in the New Testament because there is such a wealth of contemporary Greek literature that it is easier to find the word in some other Greek work and thus decipher its meaning. For example, in Rom. 16:2, Paul refers to Phoebe as *prostatis* (προστατις, Strong 4368). That word is used nowhere else in the New Testament. Here it is a noun, but it is found in verb form in other Greek literature and means care for, aid, or preside over. Most scholars are content to translate it in Romans as helper or [financial] benefactor.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Shakespeare invented over 1700 new words, many of which are hapaxes. Fortunately, their meaning is obvious in almost every case. In English literature he may well be the king of the hapax legomenon.

² A complete list is at <https://community.logos.com/forums/t/66705.aspx>.

³ A complete list is at <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7236-hapax-legomena>.

Clothes Make the Man

That phrase, originally *vestis virum facit*, is often wrongly attributed to Quintilian, although in fact it appears nowhere in any ancient Latin literature.¹ Notwithstanding, it is certainly true that clothes at least often identify the man (or woman). In almost every society until quite recently a person's clothing clearly denoted his wealth, social status and authority. In some societies this was even controlled by law. In ancient Rome, for instance, only a Roman Citizen (about 6% of the population) could legally wear a toga,² and only a member of the senatorial or patrician class could wear a purple stripe on his toga. It was a crime to violate that restriction. Still today clothing such as a uniform, clerical garb, yarmulke, hajib or even "business attire" serves as an identifier of role, religion or status.³

Recent archaeological finds from ancient Syria give a clear picture of dress in the Near East during the Early Bronze Age (3000-2000 BC). Although this was at the time of the early rise of the Egyptian Empire and well before the time of Abraham or Moses, the styles established then continued well into the early Canaanite period, the time of Joshua. They would not have seemed at all surprising to Abraham and his followers, and their influence went well into the time of the Israelite

¹ Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (Quintilian) was a first century AD Roman educator and philosopher who lived in Roman Hispania (Spain). Although famous in his own time, he was extremely popular in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages and was widely quoted and as often misquoted. Today countless sayings are falsely attributed to famous people like Lincoln and Einstein, and the same was true long ago. Most of Quintilian's writings have survived, and many of his "quotations" cited in the Middle Ages are found nowhere in them. What Quintilian actually said was, "Tasteful and magnificent dress, as [Homer] tells us, lends added dignity to its wearer."

² The toga was adopted from the Etruscans in about the 6th century BC to indicate aristocracy. It was a 16 to 20 foot long bean-shaped cloth that was draped about the body in such a way that it was almost impossible to put it on by oneself. It restricted physical movement, publicly demonstrating that the wearer had slaves to put it on him and to do his work for him.

³ In the business world, upper management people are often called "suits."

conquest of Canaan. Remember that Syria in ancient times represented a far larger portion of the Near East than it does today.

In the Early Bronze Age the city-state of Ebla was rich and powerful, and served as a main center of commerce in the known world. Its political and economic structure was organized as a redistribution center of goods from its own industries as well as those of surrounding communities. Its primary industries were metalworking and textiles (mainly wool and linen), but it dealt in whatever merchandise it could distribute. As a result, the state not only became rich, powerful and influential, but it developed a full spectrum of social classes from the elite to the lowest levels of society (including, of course, slaves). To identify these, the city-state provided the clothing for everyone from the king to the lowest menial. The administrative ministry kept voluminous records of the merchandise that was moved. In about 2400 BC Minister Ibrum recorded the movement of 1800 garments and 1300 kilts, while a few years later his successor Minister Ibbi-zikir recorded 5500 garments and 3000 kilts. Garments were usually white, black or red, while the best quality kilts were multi-colored. Women wore white or red for their weddings or when they became priestesses. Red was the color for funerals. Statues of gods and goddesses were presented with black clothes, while kings wore white garments and multicolored kilts.

Clothing for all people was supplied by the state according to their status. The advantage of this was that anyone's rank, wealth and importance could be determined immediately, and it was illegal to wear clothing that was not appropriate to these. As the ruling power in the region, Ebla sent clothing as gifts to the kings and councils of elders of its surrounding vassal city-states. Kings received garments and kilts "of the highest quality," while the elders received simpler ones. The messengers who delivered them were paid with a "thin cloth of low-quality wool." In exchange the vassal kings sent Ebla gifts of silver and similar garments. This was apparently an annual ceremonial exchange of gifts to seal the bonds of alliance.

Men's clothing consisted of a robe or cloak, a skirt, and a

kilt folded three times. Kings and the elite insiders wore a “double cloak,” while elders and chief village representatives wore a “single cloak” of simpler design and poorer cloth. A woodcarving of about 2340 BC depicts King Irkab-damu wearing a turban and an ankle-length cloak with his right shoulder exposed. The cloak is decorated with five rows of woolen tufts. This type of royal cloak is seen in drawings and descriptions throughout the 3rd millennium BC Middle East. The turban looked like a thick wig with a lock hanging down on one side.¹ Men, even the king, were generally bare-chested, although they may have worn a cloth covering during the colder seasons. This also seems to have been the norm in Egypt and throughout the Middle East. Men of lower status generally wore only a kilt made of low-quality cloth. The king wore exactly the same kind of kilt as underwear except that his was made of finely woven soft wool or fine linen. His outer multi-colored kilt was decorated with woolen tufts and a wide belt. Only the very elite were allowed to wear such a garment.

Religious communities consisted of priests, professional musicians and dancers, and acolytes. Every young man of the elite classes was required to serve as an acolyte for a fixed number of years. Each member of the community was supplied with a cloak and kilt of a design and quality that denoted his status and function. Government workers and soldiers also received a kilt and short cloak, but of very low-quality wool.

Women of high rank wore a robe that covered them from the neck to the feet, which it appears were bare. The robe was layered with tiers of heavy woolen tufts, and the only opening was for the head and two holes in front for their arms. It is unclear what head covering if any they wore, but they may have worn wigs. Lower-class women wore a simple ankle-length robe of inferior material. Many women also wore a stole, and women of all classes veiled their heads during the marriage rites.

¹ In Egypt for centuries the prince wore no headdress. His head was shaven except for a braided lock on one side of his head. Once he ascended the throne his head was shaven and he wore an elaborate royal headdress.

Men and women alike wore “bands for the head, the breast and the feet.” Until quite recently in the Middle East bands were used by women to support the breasts, and both men and women wrapped bands around their feet to protect them. Likewise, both men and women carried a bag rather like a small purse. It was usually black, but occasionally was white or red.

Jewelry was not supplied by the state, but obviously one’s jewelry was a sign of his wealth (but not necessarily of his social status, since some could be wealthy but not of high social rank). In death one’s jewelry was usually buried with him, but since the state supplied his burial shroud, it was that rather than his jewelry which denoted his class. Members of the lower classes received only a “thin cloth” for a shroud, while the elite received the same clothing that that was normally given annually. Upper class women were given for their burials the same clothing that they were given for their wedding or when they took their vows as priestesses.

Ecclesiastes said that there is nothing new under the sun. In ancient Ebla, as today almost 5000 years later, clothing denoted one’s status, wealth, and often his profession.

Richard R. Losch+

“Missing Link” Alphabet Discovered

In early April of this year the archaeological journal *Antiquity* made a startling announcement. It was the discovery of a pottery shard in the historical biblical city of Lachish that contained a proto-Hebrew alphabetical inscription. The shard was radiocarbon dated to the mid 15th century BC, the early part of the Late Bronze Age. It was previously believed that alphabetical writing did not reach the central Levant until the late 13th century BC, over two centuries later. The earliest alphabetical writing found in the southern Levant was from the 19th century BC, in some crude inscriptions in an Egyptian turquoise mine. Those inscriptions were clearly Egyptian however, and not Canaanite. Before that, writing in Egypt was in hieroglyphics, which are symbols representing syllables and sometimes whole

words. Since throughout much of its history at that time Canaan was under Egyptian control, the mutual influences are not surprising. This is especially true since the first transition from hieroglyphics to an alphabet took place at about the same time that the Hyksos, a Semitic people believed to have been from somewhere around Canaan, briefly ruled Egypt in the 17th-16th centuries BC.¹ Alphabetic writing is made up of characters which represent individual sounds, and are combined to spell out syllables and words. The first alphabetic letters were adaptations of hieroglyphics representing individual sounds, but soon thereafter unique letters began to appear.²

The recently discovered Lachish inscription was painted on a shard of pottery imported from Cyprus, but the painting was done on it in the region of Lachish in Canaan. It contains two lines. The first is *abd* (עבד), servant, and the second is *npt* (נפת), honey or nectar. The experts believe that the first line was part of a person's name, identifying himself as the servant of some god, and that the pot contained honey as an offering to the god. While the letters are proto-Hebrew, this was written before the post-Exodus invasion of the Israelites into Canaan. The Canaanite language was in the Semitic family of languages (that includes Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic and Arabic), and when an alphabet was developed it was virtually the same as the Hebrew alphabet, which arose at the same time. The alphabet in the Lachish inscription seems to be the missing link between the earliest Canaanite and later Hebrew alphabets.

Richard R. Losch+

The biggest troublemaker you will probably ever have to deal with watches you from the mirror every morning.

¹ Many scholars believe that it was during the Hyksos rule that the Israelites were invited into Egypt, and after the Egyptians regained control in 1521 BC they suppressed the Hyksos' friends, the Israelites.

² For example, the letter A was originally upside down (∇) and represented a bull's head. Presumably it denoted the lowing of a bull, which is interpreted as "aah".

Pontius Pilate

Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea from c. AD 26-37, is the only mortal other than the Blessed Virgin Mary who is mentioned in the Creeds, and yet he was hardly a man of great faith. One reason he is mentioned by name is that he represents the exact opposite of all that Christ represents. While Christ denoted all that is pure and holy, Pilate represents Rome, and thus all that is worldly and oppressive. As the world tries futilely to destroy that which is holy, so Pilate tried futilely to destroy Christ. Another reason was to counter the rather gentle image of him that is pictured in the gospel narratives of the trial of Jesus. Also, in the 4th century AD, when the Nicene Creed was formulated, there was a rising tradition in Egypt that Pilate converted to Christianity and should be revered as a saint. To most Christians this was an unacceptable myth.

Not a great deal is known about Pilate, but the historic fragments we have, together with some solid reasoning, give us a pretty good picture of him. His first name is not known, although some traditions say it was Marcus. Pontius was actually his family name, and Pilate (Pilatus) was a family nickname. The family Pontius (the *Pontii*) are believed to have been of the lower level of aristocrats known as Equestrians. It is also possible, however, that they were descended from a freedman (a freed slave) who had become wealthy and in a few generations his descendants had gained power and respect in Rome.¹ The reason scholars think this possible is because of the name Pilate (Pilatus). It is a *cognomen*, which was a family nickname that carried on often for generations. It could mean “javelin (*pilum*) thrower,” or it could refer to a *pilius*, which was a red conical hat that was often worn by freedmen to show their free status. At any rate, the Pontii were now rich and in the lower

¹ In earlier times this would not have been possible. Freedmen could become wealthy in business, but they rarely had much respect or power. By the first century AD, however, they could rise socially. The emperor Claudius' two prime advisors were the freedmen Pallas and Narcissus. They helped him rule the empire, and were two of the richest men in Rome.

echelons of the aristocracy. As such, there were only two socially acceptable courses of life for aristocratic men, and those were the military and politics. In fact, with very few exceptions, no man had much hope of a successful political career if he had not previously distinguished himself in the military.

The very fact that Pilate was assigned procurator of Judea says a great deal about his status or that of his family in Rome. Judea was considered one of the most God-forsaken outposts of the empire, and there was little *dignitas*¹ associated with an assignment there. As a member of an important family he merited a foreign appointment. Every man dreamed of an assignment to a rich province like Syria, Hispania (Spain) or Egypt, not to a desert outpost like Judea. An assignment to the boon-docks of Judea (which was part of the southern tip of Syria) was almost an insult. Pilate may have been assigned there because his family was at the bottom of the ladder, but it is far more likely that it was because of his own shortcomings. He may have failed to distinguish himself in the military, he may have had personal shortcomings that made him undesirable, or both. His behavior while in Judea certainly supports the latter.

Whatever the reason, it is evident that Pilate was not happy with his assignment, that he arrived there dissatisfied, and that he hated the Jews. He may have already hated them—anti-Semitism in Rome was not serious, but it was definitely there—or he may have hated them simply because he was taking out his discontent on them. Whatever the reason, one of his first official

¹ *Dignitas*, a word for which there is no adequate English translation, was more important to an upper-class Roman than almost anything else, even his life. It is something of a combination of honor, fame, worthiness, respect and glory. It was more-or-less equivalent to the oriental concept of “face.” It is the root of the English word dignity, but *dignitas* was far more than that. A man’s *dignitas* determined not only how powerful and influential he was, but also even how wealthy he could become. *Dignitas* was earned by having great achievements, but it was also fragile. One bad scandal or failure could totally destroy a man’s *dignitas*. One of the reasons so many Romans committed suicide after a *dignitas*-destroying scandal or failure is that the *dignitas* of his family was restored by his suicide.

acts was to offend them knowingly and intentionally. Since Pompey's entry into Jerusalem in 63 BC, the Romans had had a tense but relatively peaceful domination of Judea. One of the main reasons was that they realized that the only way to keep the peace with the Jews was to respect their religion, particularly in two respects: they did not require the Jews to worship a Roman god along with their worship of God, and they did not bring any pagan idols or symbols into the holy city of Jerusalem. The Roman legions all carried a standard bearing the Roman eagle (a symbol of Jupiter) and images of the legion's own particular tutelary gods. They carried these with them wherever they went, even into battle, except when they entered Jerusalem. There they left them in care of the guards at the city gate. One of Pilate's first official acts was to order the legions to keep their standards with them. The Roman armory, the Antonia, was right next to the Temple. Pilate erected an eagle over the entrance, and placed two enormous bronze shields with the image of Mars on the entrance walls immediately facing the main entrance to the Temple. This was not ignorance—it was clear that Pilate knew exactly what he was doing. He was asserting his authority and declaring that there would be no concessions made to the Jews. This infuriated them, even those who were otherwise cooperative with the Romans. At another time there was a peaceful protest against one of his actions. A large crowd had gathered outside his palace to present a petition of their grievances. He infiltrated the crowd with soldiers dressed as Jewish civilians, but with swords under their robes. At a given signal they threw off their robes and massacred the protesters. On another occasion a group of Galileans were offering sacrifice, and Pilate not only slaughtered them, but had their blood mixed with the blood of the sacrifice (Lk 13:1).

One might ask, if Pilate were really such a monster, why do the gospels present him as a reasonable man at Jesus' trial? The gospels were not written just for the Judean Jews. They were written to be read by the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike. A huge number of their readers would have been Romans and Roman sympathizers. There was nothing to be gained by

painting a Roman governor as a monster, and it might well have alienated many readers. The point was to emphasize the injustice of Jesus' death, regardless of who was responsible.

The hard evidence is scanty, but there is enough that along with strong very early tradition we can discern what finally happened to Pilate. In about AD 37 Caligula, having just ascended the throne, recalled Pilate to Rome.¹ He was there tried on a charge of abuse of power and extreme cruelty, and condemned to death. As an aristocrat he was given the choice of execution or suicide, and committed suicide.²

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

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

Rich R. Losch+

YouTube Videos

If you missed one of my Sunday YouTube homilies or want to go back to re-listen to one, they are all available on my website at www.rlosch.com. That is easier than trying to search for a particular one on YouTube.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ It seems ironic that Caligula, one of the cruelest of all the emperors, would be upset by someone else's cruelty. In fact, during his first year he was not only extremely popular with the common people, but was a reasonably good ruler. During that year his behavior became increasingly unstable, and he ultimately descended into complete insanity.

² A Roman's honor (his *dignitas*—see footnote on p. 13 above) was more important to him than anything else, even his life. If he were executed, he not only would lose his *dignitas*, but also his property would go to the state, leaving his family penniless. If he committed suicide his family kept his estate and his and his family's *dignitas* was posthumously restored.

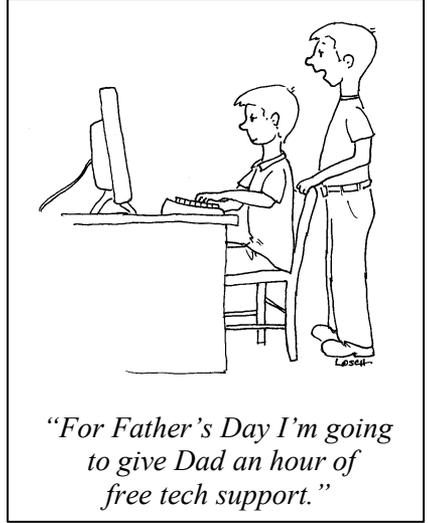
A Touch of Trivia

The kitten in the opening scenes of *The Godfather* was not supposed to be there. It was a stray that kept hanging around the set. Marlon Brando picked it up to move it off the scene, but it took to him immediately and would not leave him. Francis Ford Coppola, the director, realized that it gave Don Vito Corleone a touch of humanity, and decided to have the Godfather hold the kitten and pet it as he talked.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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