

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

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February 2021

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month, in honor of the Feast of Saint Matthias (February 24) is a 14th century icon by Simone Martini. It is tempera on wood, and is one of the panels in an altarpiece in the Church of Sant'Agostino in San Gimignano, Italy. The altarpiece is a polyptych, made up of several similar panels depicting saints and events in Christ's life. This panel is small, measuring 2'3½"x1'10". It depicts Saint Matthias with a contemplative look, holding the Holy Scriptures. The Bible would not be canonized until almost three centuries after his life, and books in Matthias' day were almost always in scroll form. The codex (modern book form) did not become popular until much later. Even so, religious art often depicted Apostles holding a codex Bible. In the 1st century, clothes had no pockets, so people carried things such as books or writing implements in the folds of their robes. We do not know if Martini knew that, but it appears that Matthias is drawing the Bible from such a fold.

Jesus appointed twelve Apostles to denote the twelve tribes of Israel. After Judas Iscariot hanged himself, the remaining eleven felt that he should be replaced. They selected two faithful disciples, Matthias and Joseph Barsabbas. They cast lots, and the lot fell on Matthias (Acts 1:23ff). There is no further mention of Matthias in the Bible, but very early tradition says that he preached in Cappadocia and in the region around the Caspian Sea, and that he was eventually stoned and then beheaded in Jerusalem. Hippolytus of Rome (AD 170-235), however, says that he died of old age in Jerusalem. Since the 11th century Matthias has been venerated on the Calends of February (usually the 24th, but the 25th in leap years). In 1969 the Roman Catholic Church moved his feast day to May 14th so it

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would not be observed during Lent, but would fall in the Easter season close to the Ascension. That is probably about the same time of year that he was originally chosen.

Simone Martini (1284-1344) was an Italian painter born in Siena. He was important in the development of pre-Renaissance Italian painting, and was a principal influence in the development of the International Gothic style. Very little documentation of his life survives. Critics disagree as to whether he was trained by the Sienese painter Duccio di Buoninsegna or by Giotto di Bondone, whom he accompanied to Rome to work on the Old Saint Peter's Basilica. Martini married the sister of his foremost follower and student, Lippo Memmi. He died in July 1344 while serving in the papal court in Avignon, France.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

As I write this we are now well into the new year, and we have reached the point when winter begins to seem interminable. As always, though, there is hope. The days are getting noticeably longer, and even on a cold day, if you stand in the sun you can feel some warmth. We are also rapidly approaching Lent, which, despite its abstinence, penitence and apparently somber nature, is actually a season of hope. Hope is not a fond dream that things might get better. Hope is the theological virtue of confidence that God will be fulfill his promises regardless of how hard Satan and the world may try to obscure them. Hope is seeing through the dark clouds of Holy Week, and seeing the glorious light of Easter. It is not looking past the darkness in order to see the light, is seeing the light through the darkness. That is an important distinction. The former is to deny the darkness and to try to tiptoe through the tulips to an easy destination. This get us nothing but confusion and disappointment. The latter is to confront the darkness head-on and to dispel it with the light, and in the process to grow and become stronger. This is why Jesus had to hang on the cross while the world was covered in darkness before he could burst forth

from the tomb in glory, and dispel sin and death. Through his death he took the final step in the perfect unification of his divinity with our humanity—death is part of humanity, and so even Christ, if he were truly human as well as truly divine, had to undergo it. With his resurrection he exalted his humanity, and thus elevated ours to a level that makes it possible for us to achieve perfection through him. That is what Lent, Holy Week and Easter are all about. One cannot be separated from the other any more than we can separate winter from spring. This is the hope of Lent, and hope will get us through any trial.

Father Rick Losch

Outreach Report for 2020

The Vestry at its final meeting in December 2020, approved and completed our outreach giving for the fiscal year 2020. The following is a list of the gifts made by the parish last year representing outreach giving of just under 10% of our received pledged income for 2020:

Angel Tree – Sumter Health & Rehab (<i>estimate</i>)	\$500.00
Department of Human Resources Elderly Fund	500.00
Diocese of Alabama – Covenant	1,000.00
Westonwood Ranch	500.00
Wilmer Hall Children's Home	500.00
<u>Livingston Community Services Society</u>	<u>300.00</u>

Total Outreach \$4,300.00

Hiram Patrenos

Parish Directory Update

The Parish Directory has been updated and is available on the table in the vestibule. Please note that any changes received will be made at the next update of the directory, which is scheduled for July 1, 2021.

Hiram Patrenos

Forward Day by Day

The new “Forward Day by Day” daily devotional booklets for February, March and April are on the table in the vestibule and in the tract rack in the parish house. They are available in both pocket-size and large print editions.

Hiram Patrenos

No Shrove Tuesday Dinner

Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we will not be having our annual Shrove Tuesday Mardi Gras dinner.

Hiram Patrenos

Ash Wednesday

On February 17th, our observance of Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, will be held at noon with a service of Holy Communion and Imposition of Ashes. Please plan to begin your observance of the Lenten Season at this special service.

Hiram Patrenos

Publication Deadlines

It takes time to prepare and format our publications, and once they are done it can often be difficult to make changes. Therefore, please submit your information or articles as early as possible, but no later than the following deadlines:

This Sunday at St. James' (Friday e-mails) – Thursday at 5:00 p.m.

Today at St. James' (Sunday e-mails) – Friday at 5:00 p.m.

Sunday bulletins – Friday at 5:00 p.m.

The Epistle (Parish Newsletter) – third Sunday at 5:00 p.m.

Hiram Patrenos

“It is since Christians have ceased to think so much about the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one.”

— C. S. Lewis
Mere Christianity

Be Wordly Wise

Arch- and -arch

A great many words in English (and in many other languages) derive from the Greek adjective *archos* (αρχος), meaning chief or principal, and almost all of them use it as a prefix or suffix attached to another root. For example, an archbishop is a chief bishop, one having authority over other bishops (but he is not necessarily the chief of all bishops). Similarly, an archangel has authority over other angels (but higher angels have authority over him).¹ The prefix arch- can also have a negative implication, as in archenemy or arch-nemesis. It can be used either as a prefix (as in archduke) or as a separate adjective (as in arch rival). There does not seem to be any consistent rule for its pronunciation. It can be pronounced with a soft *ch* (as “artsh”) or a hard one (as “ark”). Generally (but not always) it is hard when used as a suffix and soft when used as a prefix. It simply depends on the word. For example, we have archbishop (soft) and archangel (hard). As a suffix, it always means a ruler or leader, as in monarch, oligarch or tetrarch.

The architectural² structure called an arch is not from the same root. It comes from the Latin *arcus*, bow or curve. Many times as languages develop they pick up words from completely different roots, and these form new words that are spelled and pronounced the same, yet have different meanings.

Richard R. Losch+

“It is the pastor’s role to comfort the afflicted. However, it is equally his role to afflict the comfortable.” —Fr. Henri Tomei

¹ Saint Michael the Archangel, in angelology, was only an angelic warrior against evil—a foot-soldier, if you will—while Lucifer was the highest of all the angels. Notwithstanding Michael rallied the good angels against Lucifer and his evil angels, defeated them, and caused them to be cast into Hell.

² Architect derives from *arch-*, chief, and *tekton* (τεκτον), builder. Thus an architect is a chief builder. *Tekton* is a versatile word meaning builder, worker with hard materials (such as a stonemason), or just hard material. The rocky continental plates that cover the earth are called tectonic plates.

Casting Lots

Saint Matthias was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot as the twelfth Apostle (Acts 1:23ff). The method of his selection was that the remaining eleven Apostles picked two of Jesus' followers, Matthias and Joseph Barsabbas. They had both witnessed the Resurrection (a requirement to be an Apostle) and were counted as outstandingly righteous men. The Apostles cast lots to determine which of the two should replace Judas. This was a process much like tossing dice. The casting of lots to determine such an important thing strikes our modern minds as a rather primitive and superstitious method of deciding, but in ancient times it was a very common practice.

The casting of lots to make important decisions goes back to the dawn of history. The idea behind it was that God (or for the pagans, the gods) would guide the lots to carry out his will. To the ancients this made perfectly good sense. God in his wisdom was certainly more qualified to make an important decision than were muddled human minds. This thinking carried through into almost modern times. In medieval times decisions were often made by combat. A contestant could fight for himself or choose what was called a champion to fight for him. The outcome of the battle determined the decision (as with David and Goliath). As recently as the early 17th century, a prosecutor or judge could call for "trial by ordeal." A common method of this was that the defendant would be blindfolded, and then he had to pick up a knife from a table. They believed that God would guide his hand. If he first touched the blade he was condemned, and if he first touched the handle he was acquitted. Even today we often make decisions (although rarely critical ones) by tossing a coin or cutting a deck of cards.¹

Part of the vestments of the High Priest in the Temple in Jerusalem was a linen tunic called an *ephod*, to which was attached a breastplate. Embedded in this breastplate were *the*

¹ There is a legend around West Central Alabama that the decision of whether to locate the Armour stockyards in Chicago or in Gainesville, AL hung on the toss of a coin. In truth it was surely based on more than that.

Urim and the Thummim (האורים והתמים), “The Lights and the Truths” (Ex. 28:30).¹ No one is exactly sure what these were, but since they were used for divination most scholars believe that they were sacred stones or jewels. It appears from several references to them that they were used for cleromancy, which is the determining of an outcome by something which would normally be random. Deciding by tossing dice, tossing a coin or cutting a deck of cards would be examples of cleromancy. There is also no description in the Bible about how the stones were used, but there are indications that they were probably tossed in some way. They may have had markings on them, or more likely there was a method of reading the position in which they fell. In most cases when the Bible refers casting lots, the implication is that a simple yes-or-no answer was obtained.²

When the Apostles cast lots for Matthias and Barsabbas they would not have had access to the Urim and Thummim (only the Hight Priest could use those), but the common people cast lots by tossing stones in much the same way. Again, we do not know just what the process was or how the results were determined, but apparently there were specific rules that were well understood in those days. The Apostles who chose Matthias had faith that God would guide the lots. While we no longer believe in that practice, we might do well to seek in general to have that kind of complete trust in God.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ The Great Seal of Yale University bears this in Hebrew, and the Yale motto is “Light and Truth.”

² When the Roman soldiers cast lots for Jesus’ clothing (Matt. 27:35) they were gambling, not divining. While the Jews relied on God to guide the lots, the Romans relied on random chance (although some may have prayed to the goddess Fortuna, “Lady Luck,” to guide the dice). Roman dice were similar to the dice we know today. They usually used cubic dice with symbols of gods on them rather than counting pips as we do today, although some Roman dice had pips. The gods had a hierarchy, and the player who cast the highest god won. They also normally used three dice instead of two, although there were many variations of dice games.

Customs of Lent

With the Lent beginning on the 17th of this month, it might be appropriate to consider some of the traditional practices of this penitential season. Although not officially a part of Lent, the Tuesday preceding Ash Wednesday, called Shrove Tuesday, is closely associated with the season. It is on that day that penitents traditionally prepare for Lent by making their confession and being absolved. The name comes from the past tense of the verb to shrive, which means to assign a penance.¹ On this day it was also an ancient practice to cleanse the home of all rich, fatty and sweet foods in preparation for simple meals during Lent. In the Middle Ages the practice arose of festively eating all those foods as a last “fling” on Shrove Tuesday. The Festival took on the French name *Mardi Gras*, “Fat Tuesday.”² It is often symbolized today by eating sausage, buttered pancakes and syrup for supper on Shrove Tuesday evening.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. Placing ashes on the head or face is a very ancient symbol of both mourning and penitence. In Christian tradition it represents both—mourning for the death of Christ as a result of our sinfulness, and penitence for the sins we have committed. The ashes are usually placed on the forehead in the form of a cross, with the words, “Remember that thou art dust, and unto dust shalt thou return.” The ashes come from burning the previous year’s Palm Sunday palms.

Christians traditionally undertake some form of self-discipline during Lent. In modern times this is often an act of self-denial, as in giving up something for Lent. This is often called a Lenten Fast, but technically it is an act of self-discipline, not a fast. A fast is the total or partial reduction of food intake. While the Lenten discipline could involve fasting, it normally does not. It should be any act designed to enhance spiritual

¹ This comes from the Latin *scriber*, to write.

² The name *Mardi Gras* actually originated in the French quarter of Mobile, Alabama, and thence spread to New Orleans and beyond. In most European and Latin American countries the festival is called Carnival. This comes from the Latin *caro*, *carn-*, meat, and *levare*, to put away.

growth or strength. All too often it is chosen to meet some worldly desire, such as giving up chocolate because we need to lose weight. That, unfortunately, defeats the whole purpose of the matter. A far better Lenten self-discipline would be to take on something extra, such as an increase in Bible study, prayer, regular self-examination, or service to others.

It is also customary to abstain from eating meat on Friday during Lent, and many abstain on Lenten Wednesdays as well.¹ The purpose of this is not to reduce the quality of food on these days, but to be a physical reminder of Christ's sacrifice for us. The point is to abstain from the flesh of any warm-blooded animal on Friday in remembrance that Christ died for us on Good Friday.² Although it would not be in the proper spirit of the observance, it is more in accord with the purpose of the abstinence to have lobster on Friday than to have a cheap hamburger. It is not so much a consideration of the quality of the meal, but the act of having to adjust our meal schedule to fit the day that reminds us of why we are doing it.

In recognition of the many biblical events that lasted forty days, Lent also lasts forty days.³ If we look at the calendar it is actually forty-six days from Ash Wednesday to Easter. This is because Sunday, being the feast of the Resurrection, can never be a fast day. Removing the six Sundays of Lent leaves us with forty days. Technically, we are not required to observe our Lenten discipline on those Sundays, although most people do observe it in order to maintain its continuity.

¹ Since the early days of the Church, Wednesday, the middle day of the week, has been designated as a day of special devotion. To this day many churches have services or other spiritual activities on Wednesday evening.

² The claim that eating fish on Friday was the Church's way of boosting the Italian fishing industry is a 17th century anti-Catholic calumny. If any Italian food industry needed boosting in those days it was meat, not fish.

³ In ancient Hebrew the expression "forty days" simply meant a very long time, not specifically that number of days. Likewise, "forty days and forty nights" meant an extremely long time. It is similar to our expression, "I have told you a thousand times ..."

The liturgical color for Lent is called penitential purple, a bluish purple anciently associated with mourning or penitence.¹ We think of purple as being the color of royalty, but that was actually a different shade of purple. Penitential purple has a bluish hue and was anciently extracted primarily from vegetation. Royal or Tyrean purple, on the other hand, is a reddish purple that is almost magenta. It was valued because it did not fade through many washings, while vegetable dyes were less durable, and faded even in sunlight. It was extracted from a Mediterranean mollusk called *murex*. It was extremely labor-intensive and thus very expensive. For this reason only the rich and powerful could afford it, and it came to be associated with authority. In ancient Rome only members of the Senatorial class were allowed to wear a purple stripe on their tunics or togas. In some ancient cultures it was a felony for anyone except royalty or the high nobility to wear it. In Late Antiquity it became the custom for bishops, the nobility of the Church, to wear a shade of purple that was less expensive than *murex*, but was similar to it. Today many bishops wear a reddish-purple shirt.² Even though Sunday can never be a fast day, the liturgical color for the Sundays of Lent is still purple. The only exception to this is the Fourth Sunday in Lent, which is something of a “breather” before we enter into the somber latter portion of the season. The color for that is optionally rose, which is a pinkish shade of purple.³ Most parishes do not have rose hangings or vestments, and stay with purple on that day.

Because of the penitential nature of Lent, there are no flowers or greens in the Church during the season, although most

¹ In the Sarum Rite, which originated in medieval Salisbury, England, the color of Lent is blue rather than purple. Some churches today use that.

² Many bishops wore red robes, and this is still associated with bishops, especially high-ranking ones (such as cardinals in the Roman Church). In modern times the distinction between purple shades seems to have been lost, and we often see bishops wearing shirts of penitential instead of royal purple, probably without realizing the difference.

³ The Third Sunday of Advent is a similar let-up, and its color is also rose.

churches will allow a diminished use of flowers for a funeral. Except under the most unusual circumstances there are no weddings during Lent, and unless the child is at risk, baptisms are deferred until the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. Also, during Lent the Gloria is omitted and Alleluia is not said in either the Mass or in the non-sacramental offices.

The last two weeks of Lent, Passion Week and particularly Holy Week, are by far the most solemn portion of the Lenten season. In those two weeks we focus directly on the last days of Jesus' earthly life. This year they fall at the end of March, so we will look more closely at these two weeks next month.

Richard R. Losch+

Prayers to the Saints

To those who do not understand the doctrine of the Communion of Saints, the idea of praying to the saints sounds pagan and idolatrous. In fact, it is nothing of the kind. First, we need to consider the difference between worship and prayer. We worship God, and him alone. Worshiping the saints (or any person or thing other than God) would indeed be idolatrous, and a mortal sin. Praying, on the other hand, is nothing more than asking for something. The word "pray" is a Middle English word that means to entreat or to ask fervently. Begging, whether it is a request for alms or a serious plea for someone to do something, is a form of prayer.

People who believe in the power of prayer, as all Christians should, have no hesitation in asking their friends or even strangers to pray for them. Most churches have prayer lists and prayer groups dedicated to intercession for the sick, for those in distress, and for a wide variety of people's needs and desires. We ask others to pray for everything from a dying loved one to the recovery of a lost pet. The reason that prayer is so powerful is not that it can bring about some miraculous or magical end, but that it has power to unify people who pray, not only with one another, but with the whole Church, and thus with God. This spiritual unification can perform wonders.

A friend wrote me at Christmastime that her grandchildren challenged the existence of Santa Claus. They said that he is really Saint Nicholas, and since he is a saint and the saints are dead, he cannot bring presents. While such a perspicacious observation from a young child is amusing, it raises an important theological point. Most people who claim that the saints are dead will be the first to affirm that their beloved Uncle Harry is in heaven. If he is in heaven then he is not dead, but has simply passed from one phase of life to another far better one.¹ In that case he is very much alive. If you would have had no problem asking him to pray for your sick child when he was in his earthly body, why would you not ask him to do the same now that he is in heaven? Praying to the saints for their intercession is no different than asking your friends for theirs, other than that the prayers of the saints are pure and clear, while ours are still clouded by ignorance and sin.

One of the great dangers that faces all mankind, and especially Christians, is that of slipping backward into paganism and idolatry. The saints are not minor gods who are assigned to special tasks, and to allow ourselves to think of them as such is to slip into idolatry. For example, Saint Anthony of Padua is the patron saint of those who have lost something. The purpose of praying to him to help us recover it is to ask him to let us focus our minds and those of others who may be helping us to search. It is not to ask him to help us miraculously locate it. We look to him specifically only because he is the saint whom we traditionally associate with lost items. The intercession of any other saint would be equally helpful, because we are not looking to a particular saint to do a particular job, we are simply asking for spiritual help to focus our thinking. It is essentially the “I can get by with a little help from my friends” mentality—and what better friends could we have than the saints?

Richard R. Losch+

¹ The question of whether he is already in heaven or in a state of continuing spiritual growth in the Church Expectant is too complex to deal with here. If the latter, he needs our prayers as much as we need his.

Jesus' Galilee—Jewish or Gentile?

Scholars have long debated about just how Jewish the Galilee of Jesus' time really was. There is no question that there were many Jews there in his time. There was a synagogue in Nazareth (Lk. 4:16). There is no question that Mary and Joseph were Jewish, and all the disciples except Judas were Galilean and were clearly Jewish. On the other hand, there was not only a large population of Samaritans there, but also as huge number of Hellenistic and Roman settlements. One of these was the Roman city of Sepphoris, a bustling metropolis only about four miles north of Nazareth.¹ On the western shore of the Sea of Galilee was the city of Tiberias, built in about AD 20.² It was built in honor of the Roman emperor Tiberius, and was situated on an ancient Jewish burial ground. This meant that any Jew entering the city would become ritually unclean, and had to be purified before he could have contact with any other Jew. The city was therefore almost exclusively Gentile.³ On the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee was the region known as the Gadarenes, where Jesus healed the madman (Mk. 5:1ff). This was a primarily Gentile area. The fact that there was a herd of swine into which Jesus cast the demons is evidence of that (the owner of the swine must not have been pleased).

Shortly after Solomon's death in 931 BC, his United Monarchy broke apart into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and

¹ Sepphoris had been a Jewish city until about 4 BC when it led a revolt against Herod Antipas. The Roman governor Publius Quinctilius Varus ordered the total destruction of the city, and had a new Roman city built on its ruins. This was the Sepphoris that Jesus knew. This was the same Varus who through his arrogance causes the slaughter of three Roman legions (about 20,000 soldiers) in the Germany's Teutoburg Forest in AD 9.

² This was about three miles south of Magdala, which was believed to be the birthplace of Mary Magdalene.

³ By the 6th century AD this restriction was no longer observed, and not only were there many Jews in Tiberias, but it had become a center of Jewish scholarship. It was in Tiberias that the first system of Hebrew vowel pointing (Tiberian Pointing or *nikkud*) originated.

Judah in the south. Israel rapidly slipped into paganism, and was finally destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC. They carried the people into exile and repopulated it with people from Mesopotamia. Galilee is roughly where Israel had been.

Because of the large number of Gentile cities and regions in Galilee, it has often been assumed that there was only a small Jewish population there. Before the 19th century it had generally been thought of as a rural Jewish area, but in the last couple of centuries, archaeological finds of Greek, Roman, Syrian, Arab and Phoenician remains from Jesus' time seemed to have proven otherwise. However, new finds and better analytical techniques of older finds are changing the picture back again. It is becoming increasingly evident that Jesus' Galilee was not a Gentile region with some Jews in it, but was clearly a Jewish region that had a lot of Gentile in it. That is an important difference, particularly when we consider that Jesus grew up in Galilee, most of his disciples were Galileans, and most of his ministry, especially the earlier part, took place there. It was not until a century later (AD 132) that the Jews would be expelled by the Romans, and the area repopulated with Gentiles.

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.

Richard R. Losch+

"Everyone thinks that they live on time's edge, but they soon find that they are nothing but a dusty detail in somebody else's history book."

*—Christopher Wickham
Medieval History*

A Touch of Trivia

Elvis Presley was noted for his love of greasy food and his lack of self-discipline. Late one night he remembered a \$50 sandwich he had eaten in Denver, and he wanted one. At a cost of \$60,00, he and his entourage flew in his private plane to Denver. The sandwich consisted of a loaf of Italian bread sliced lengthwise and scooped out, and filled with ½ pound of butter, one jar each of peanut butter and grape jelly, and a pound of deep-fried bacon.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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