

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
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This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is “Pentecost” by Tiziano Vecellio (Titian, 1488?-1576), celebrating the Day of Pentecost on May 24. The painting was commissioned by the Friars of the Church of Santo Spirito in Venice and was intended as the main altar piece. It is not clear what happened, but the original was either ruined or lost before it was ever hung in the church. Fortunately, Titian had researched the subject carefully and had made exhaustive drawings and sketches in preparation for the work. He had kept them, so he was able to reproduce it exactly. Unfortunately, he did so only after long litigation with the friars, whom he held responsible. His second copy, completed in 1541, was placed over the altar of San Nazaro Church in Brescia. It is a huge painting, oil on canvas, measuring 18'8"x8'. It is currently in the private collection of Church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, where it is displayed in the Sacristy.

The painting depicts the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Twelve Apostles¹ and the Virgin Mary on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff). The Holy Spirit appears as a dove descending from the blinding glory of the Father and the Son. His gift to them of the Deposit of Faith² is represented, as the book of Acts tells us, by tongues of fire appearing over their heads. This is in fulfillment of John the Baptist's prophecy that while he baptized with water, Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matt. 3:11).

Tiziano Vecellio (commonly called Titian) is one of the most important painters of the late Italian Renaissance. In an era when painting with oils on canvas was waning in favor of frescoes and oil on wood panels, he was recognized as one of the greatest masters of the art. He was then and still is noted as a pure genius in his use of color. Tiziano Vecellio was born about 1488/90 in Pieve di Cadore,

¹ Judas Iscariot was dead, but Matthias had been selected to replace him, and was present with the rest of the Apostles on that day.

² Jesus' disciples barely understood what he had said and done, even including his death and Resurrection. They were confused and frightened in the days following the Resurrection. On Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled them and gave them the ability to understand and develop the faith, to formulate doctrine, and to have the courage to proclaim that faith to a hostile world. The proof of that was the frightened Peter's bold sermon to the Jews on that day, after which three thousand were baptized (Acts 2:14ff).

Republic of Venice. Almost nothing is known about his family. Very early in life his painting came to be recognized as a great talent. His name was often Latinized to Titianus. Shortly after that, the English-speaking world called him Titian (pron. *Tishun*), and he is almost universally known by that name today. He was one of the most important painters of the entire Italian Renaissance and was certainly the foremost in the Venetian school. To present his long biography here with any accuracy would take pages, so we will leave it to the reader to research him if you so desire. There is a plethora of information about him on the Internet. He died in 1576 in Venice and is buried there in the Basilica of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

Back in the 1960s, Fairfield County, Connecticut, a suburb of New York City, had the highest per capita alcohol consumption rate in the country. A statistical study showed that the rapid increase in health club membership exactly matched the increase in alcohol consumption. It drew the conclusion that either the increase in physical activity led to a higher use of alcohol, or vice versa. What the study failed to consider was that the increase in both also exactly equaled the increase in population of the area. When the population increases by $x\%$, it is reasonable to expect an $x\%$ increase in health club membership and in alcohol consumption. Another extremely controversial issue of the time that affects us more today was the 1962 Supreme Court ruling that banned prayer in the public schools. It was very soon after that that people noticed a decline in public school performance, and were quick to blame it on the removal of prayer. To this day there is a strong movement to restore prayer to the public schools, with many convinced that this is the solution to our disastrous education problem. For six decades I have argued (often very unpopularly) that the removal of prayer from the schools had no effect on the fall of our educational system, and that restoring it will

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have no significant effect on its recovery. Like the Fairfield County study, the fact that two things seem to go hand in hand offers no evidence that either caused the other. Restoring prayer to the public schools, while I encourage it, is like putting a clean band-aid on an unwashed, infected wound. It may look nice on the surface, but it is useless for healing. Removal of prayer from the public schools was not the cause of the problem. It was a symptom of a problem that already had long existed and was beginning to fester. That problem was our country's having already started turning away from God. That problem has continued to grow, as is witnessed by the plummeting church attendance and membership statistics in the last 60 years. God has not abandoned us, however, and there is hope.

There is an encouraging but unexpected sudden rise in Christian movements among young people today, especially among college students and "Gen-Xers." While waves of emotional and sentimental religiosity come and go relatively frequently, this one seems to be different. It is a movement toward more conservative traditional religion. During Holy Week and Easter, for example, the Roman Catholic and liturgically disciplined Protestant churches had more young people this year than have been seen in many years, particularly in urban areas. These were not people seeking "guitar masses" and entertainment-filled coffee-drinking services in parish halls. These were places that offered disciplined, structured traditional worship in altar-centered churches. It is much too early to determine the real cause of this, but it seems that people are finally coming to realize that there is a void in their lives that memes, sound bites, and social media with no personal contact or responsibility are unable to fill. God can and will fill that void and it is our duty to do all that we can to help that happen. It is something to be watched, to be prayed for, and to be nourished however we can. Restoration of prayer to the schools, while it would be a blessing to the school systems and to our children, may not be the real solution to any current problem. Restoration of prayer to our lives, on the other hand, is the ultimate solution to all our problems.

Richard R. Losch+

There is only one basic human right, the right to do as you please. And with it comes the only basic human duty, the duty to take the consequences.

– P.J. O'Rourke (1993)

Literacy in Biblical Times

Today most civilized nations take universal literacy for granted. We understand that there will always be a few people who, through some disability, ignorance, or indifference, cannot read or write at least proficiently, but it is generally assumed that anyone we meet can read and write, even though many choose not to bother to do so any more than is essential. In fact, universal literacy is a relatively modern phenomenon. As recently as the 17th century most people in the world were almost totally illiterate, and facility in reading and writing was confined to a select few. In medieval times literacy was considered undesirable by many in the upper classes. A “real man” should devote his attention to learning to master the military arts, with martial training often beginning as early age six or seven for boys. Working-class boys started as young as that learning their father’s trade. Peasant children worked from dawn to dusk and had no time for any intellectual pursuits. In some trades they might have to learn enough to be able to keep records, but anything beyond that was considered a waste of time. Even in the monasteries usually the only people who were adept at reading and writing were a handful of scholars and the scribes who copied manuscripts, including the Bible. Until relatively modern times women of all classes had very little literary education. They were taught music, sewing, and the domestic arts. Many of the ancient great classics, such as Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey and the Epic of Gilgamesh were not put to paper until centuries after they were created. They were poems and stories passed on orally from generation to generation.

Even when books became common, reading was very different in ancient times from what it is today. For one thing, reading was almost always done aloud, even when one was reading all by himself (Acts 8:30). Also, the original languages were written with no capitals or punctuation and often even with no spacing between the words. One of the attributes of Julius Caesar that amazed many of his contemporaries was that he could not only read a document on first sight, but he could read it silently, and did not even move his lips! This was a very rare talent. As recently as the 13th century A.D., St. Thomas Aquinas was noted for being able to read without moving his lips. In some respects, the practice of always reading aloud might have been a great advantage to the less educated people. If you stopped to read the inscription on a temple, for example, you

would read it aloud and the people around you who could not read at all learned what it said, and many would pass it on to others.

In the first couple of millennia after the invention of writing, the art was used primarily for recording business records like inventories and bills, and not for the transmission of philosophical insights or telling stories. These were transmitted orally, sometimes in poetic form and sometimes as prose, but they were almost exclusively an oral tradition, not a written record. This is also true of many of the oldest books in the Bible. For example, the Book of Exodus tells of events that started in the 13th century BC, but almost all scholars agree that it was not written down until sometime around the eighth century BC at the earliest, and possibly not until after the return from the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BC. It is the same with the Psalms. Most scholars are content with the claim that King David composed at least 73 of the Psalms and yet he was an 11th-century BC shepherd boy who certainly would not have been able to read or write. In those days works like the Psalms would never have been written down, but rather would have been passed on orally. We know that psalms were an integral part of the worship in the temple going back to the tenth century BC, but they would not have been considered works of literature (which in fact did not even exist at the time), but rather songs of worship. Their transmission would have been oral for centuries.

Beginning in the earliest days of writing there developed a professional class known as scribes. Their primary function was to become facile enough with writing and reading that they could keep accurate records of such things as business arrangements, inventories, treasury values, etc. They were not scholars or authors, but clerks. Over time they became an important adjunct to society not only for business and government arrangements but also for communication. You could hire a scribe to write a letter for you or to read one that had been sent to you. In time the art of letter writing became an important part of the literature of a society. Some scribes developed such a mastery of the language that, combined with a good imagination, they could qualify as what today we would call an author. Many very well-educated men did very little writing on their own, but dictated their works to scribes. Cicero, for example, one of Rome's greatest orators, wrote very little. We have exhaustive libraries of his orations and other writings, but they all were put to paper by his scribe Tiro, a well-educated Greek slave to whom he

would dictate his work. It is evident that St. Paul dictated most of his letters to a scribe, occasionally adding something in his own hand. He says, "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand" (Gal. 6:11), referring to a small section of his letter. He says similar things at the end of several other letters.¹ Saint Peter was a prosperous fisherman and may have had a minimal education in reading and writing, but even so it is unlikely that he was highly literate. The Greek that is used in his letters is of very high quality. This indicates that if he was indeed their author these letters, he dictated them to a scribe with instructions for him to "punch up" the language. This was a common practice (even today many people who are blessed with excellent secretaries do the same).

Over the centuries, while many scribes remained little more than clerks, some continued to develop their education and became great scholars and writers. Many of the scribes in the temple in Jerusalem, whose primary responsibility was to copy the Scriptures, also became noted scholars of the Torah. When we read in the Bible about the scribes challenging Jesus, these would have been scribes from the temple who were experts in the law and knew what they were talking about.² Jesus had probably been well educated as a boy in the synagogues of Sepphoris. The rest of the disciples were likely illiterate or barely literate except for Nathanael and Philip, but that is a long story that is outside the scope of this article.

Richard R. Losch+

The Bible's "Hidden Things"

All recognized Christian Bibles contain the same 27 books that are commonly called collectively "the New Testament." There are many disagreements about what books should form what we commonly call "the Old Testament." For example, the Roman Catholic Old Testament contains 46 books whereas the collection that is incorrectly called the "Protestant Bible" contains only 39.³ The

¹ E.g. 1 Cor. 16:21, 2 Thes. 3:17, Col. 4:18, and Philemon 1:19

² When the Gospels talk about "lawyers," it is more likely referring to the Pharisees, whose full purpose was to study every aspect of the Law. The temple scribes would have been Sadducees.

³ It is incorrectly called the "Protestant Bible" because it is not unique to Protestantism. Many branches of Christianity that are usually associated

numbers differ among the various Eastern Orthodox bodies. When the collection of books was first canonized (recognized by the Church as the official Scriptures), 46 books of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, were included in the canon. In the fifth to the tenth centuries A.D., a group of Jewish biblical scholars in the Levant and Mesopotamia, called the Mazorettes, assembled a collection of only 39 of those books. This collection is known as the Masoretic Texts and is the basis of the modern Hebrew Bible.¹ When Luther translated the Bible into German, he chose to translate the Masoretic Texts rather than the Alexandrian ones, and thus the so-called “Protestant Bible” was born. The remaining books have been gathered as a collection known as the Apocrypha, meaning “Hidden Things.” Various Church bodies also differ in what they consider to be part of the Apocrypha. For example, in the Roman Catholic Bible the first two books of the Maccabees are included in the canon of the Bible, while in the Masoretic texts they are not. The most widely accepted collection of the Apocrypha is 15 books: 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras,² Tobias, Judith, Esther (Part II), the Wisdom of Solomon (not to be confused with the canonical Song of Solomon), Ecclesiasticus (aka Sirach)³, Baruch, A Letter of Jeremiah,⁴ The Song of the Three Children, Daniel and Susannah, Daniel and Bel and the Dragon (or Serpent), The Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Maccabees, and 2 Maccabees.

The major difference today between apocryphal texts and

with Protestantism around the world, such as several Lutheran and Anglican bodies, recognize the Nicene canon of 72 books.

¹ Contrary to a common misunderstanding, the Hebrew Bible is not the same as the Christian Old Testament. For the most part it includes the same books, but often in different combinations, with different titles, and in a different order. The basic theological, historical, and literary structure of the Hebrew Bible and the various Christian Old Testaments is very similar, however.

² Esdras is Greek for Ezra. Some lists consider the canonical Book of Ezra to be two books, and identify 1 & 2 Esdras as Esdras III and Esdras IV.

³ Not to be confused with the canonical Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiasticus is often known as Sirach or the Book of Jesus ben-Sirach.

⁴ Baruch was a scribe and the secretary of the Prophet Jeremiah. Some lists consider A Letter of Jeremiah to be a part of the Book of Baruch.

canonical texts is that while apocryphal texts may be used for inspiration and teaching, they may not be used as the basis of doctrine or official teachings of the church. That is reserved only for the canonical texts. Whether or not a church body accepts a text as canonical or apocryphal, or rejects it altogether, can have a distinct effect on the nature, breadth, and depth of its official theology.

Richard R. Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

Nellie, Ned, and Nan

Common nicknames for Ellen, Edward, and Anne are Nellie, Ned, and Nan. Where did the “N” come from? For centuries, it was common to precede the name of someone that you were close to with an affectionate “my,” as in “my Tommy,” “my Susie,” even when addressing them directly. This was used well into the 20th century, as in Willa Cather’s 1918 novel *My Antonia*. Just as we use “a” before a consonant and “an” before a vowel (a peach, an apple), “my” was used before a consonant, and “mine” before a vowel (“Mine eyes have seen the glory...”). A phenomenon of language that we see frequently is transferring a letter or syllable from one word to another. It is entirely possible that sometime in the future we will not eat an apple, we will eat a napple. This is happening right now. How often have you heard the expression, “a whole nother thing?” Linguists believe it is likely that in the future, “another” may be seen as “a nother” instead of “an other.” This is what happened to these names. Mine Ellie, mine Ed, and mine Anne have become my Nellie, my Ned, and my Nan. Now that we rarely use the prefix “my,” it is just Nellie, Ned, and Nan.

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

In medieval times before the relatively recent invention of banking, the tangible wealth of the very rich in a great part consisted of gems and precious metals. Many of the gems were unset, while many were set into jewelry such as pendants, neck chains, and tiaras. Most of this jewelry was never intended to be worn, but was kept for its intrinsic value. Most of the “crown jewels” of medieval and even modern royalty are more representatives of wealth and power

than they are items of beauty to be worn. Those that are ever used in public at all are used only on very special ceremonial occasions such as coronations, jubilees, etc. Precious metals were often in the form of bullion or coins, but a large part of the metal was in what is known as “plate.” This was generally such things as cups, dishes, bowls, candlesticks, salt cellars, and similar tableware. Sometimes these items might be decorated with precious stones, but most often they were simply made of pure silver and gold. They were never intended to be used, but were kept as a method of storing wealth that made exchange between owners very easy. In those days a considerable part of a person’s perceived wealth was his social status and that was strongly influenced by the quality and beauty of his plate. Treasuries were often stacked high with chests and barrels filled with plate. They were exchanged in their current form, but they were also sometimes melted down and exchanged as bullion. This was the original meaning of “liquidating” assets. Plate was usually made of pure or high-content silver or gold so that its value could be easily calculated by weight, much as coinage is evaluated. It functioned as a reserve savings fund for churches and monasteries, the elite, and royal households. Gifts of plate were also status symbols. They were exchanged when the powerful visited each other. It was also a status symbol to display a particularly beautiful piece of plate to impress visitors. There is a vestige of this even today when we place a valuable piece of silver or china in a display cabinet in the dining room with no intention ever of using it to serve food. An item of plate made by a famous artist was of special value and was rarely “liquidated.” One of the most beautiful examples of medieval plate is the gold Cellini saltcellar. It was commissioned by King Francis I of France, and is now on display in the Vienna Art Museum. There is still a vestige of using plate as a gift when we give such things as a gold spoon or silver porringer as a baby gift, or a silver tray for a wedding. The gold that the Magi gave to Jesus may well have been plate, as would be the vessels that contained the frankincense and myrrh (the Holy Family probably sold them to support themselves during their time in Egypt).

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Is there another word for synonym?
