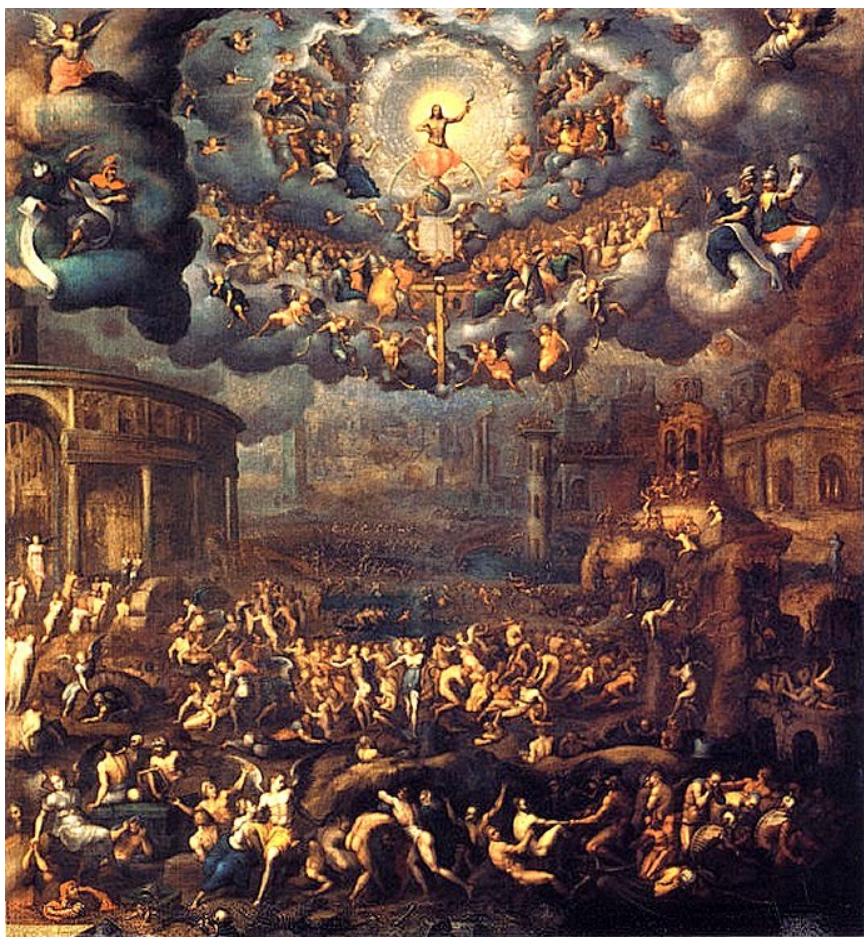


THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
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This Month's Cover

The new liturgical year commences this month with the First Sunday of Advent on November. During Advent we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas, and also recognize the promised Second Coming of Christ, when he will return at the End Times to judge the world. Our cover painting this month is *The Last Judgment* by the French painter Jean Cousin the Younger (1522-1595). In about 1560 he made the first pencil sketches for the painting, which still survive, but he did not start serious work on the final product until more than 20 years later. Completed about 1585, it is oil on canvas and is almost square at about 4'8" on a side. It is displayed in the Louvre in Paris.

In 1541, Michelangelo completed his fresco *The Last Judgment* on the east wall of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The fresco gained international attention almost immediately, and was so powerful and impressive that no significant painter attempted another rendering of the Last Judgment for 20 years. Cousin was obviously trying to outdo Michelangelo's number of figures, but in doing so produced a painting with so many dark, confusing figures that most critics consider it too much of what otherwise might have been a good thing. He portrays a depraved, condemned humanity crawling all over the world, looking almost like an infestation of worms. Unfortunately, the painting is so "busy" that it tends to lose its effectiveness.

This is the only known painting that can be ascribed unquestionably to Jean Cousin the Younger. Cousin was born in Sens, France in about 1522, the son of Jean Cousin the Elder, a noted painter of his time, who was often compared to his contemporary Albrecht Dürer. Jean the Younger was trained by his father, who often said that his son had at least as much talent as he. The work of the son is so much like that of his father that they are often indistinguishable. This is why *The Last Judgment* is the only painting that can definitely be attributed to the Younger. Very little is known about the life of this painter. His father published a famous book on perspective in

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art, and in it praised the book that his son was writing on portraiture. Allegedly there were two editions of that work printed, but none has survived. Jean Cousin the Younger died in 1595.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

At the time of this writing, we are closely approaching what may be one of the most important elections in modern history. The two leading parties are at polar opposites in political and economic philosophies, and the direction this country takes for the next several years could well depend on the outcome of this election. No matter where you fall on the political spectrum, your vote is not only critical, but is also a civic and moral responsibility. The most dangerous vote of all is the one that is not cast. The tyrannies of the 20th century that cost millions of lives and unimaginable suffering were able to gain power only because enough good people did not think they could do anything to stop them and therefore did nothing. Admittedly, one vote will not make a difference. Neither will one raindrop, but we saw what enough of them together did to Hawaii and the Grand Canyon a couple of months ago. It is the same with prayer. The prayers of a single person probably don't matter all that much except to that person and to God. The prayers of enough people, however, have a power beyond imagination. Pray that God will inspire the voters of this country to choose leaders who will truly strive to do God's will for the benefit of the country, and not for the benefit of their own interests. God will protect us, but we must ask.

Richard R. Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

Advent

The new liturgical year begins this on the November 29 with the Season of Advent. The word derives from the Latin *adventus*, arrival. The season, of course, refers both to the birth of Christ and to the Second Coming, which is when Christ will return to the earth for the final judgment. Advent has nothing directly to do with some apocalyptic calamity, Armageddon, or the theologically questionable doctrine of the Rapture. The Apocalypse is a vision of the end times that was shared with Daniel, Saint John the Divine, and some

of the Old Testament prophets; Armageddon refers to the gathering of the powers of good and evil for their final conflict, and the Rapture is a biblically unsupported doctrine that arose in the 19th century. None of these has to do with Advent, which is the season in which we prepare to celebrate the first coming of Christ at Christmas, and are admonished to prepare for his Second Coming at the End Times. The primary focus of the liturgical season of Advent is penitence in preparation for the celebration of the birth of Christ.

Richard R. Losch+

The Peace of God

The concept of peace is something that we tend to take for granted, but it is taken very seriously in the Bible. “Peace” appears 429 times in the Old and New Testaments. *Shalom* ‘aleikem (שָׁלוֹם (עֲלֵיכֶם), “peace be with you,” has been a standard Jewish greeting for millennia. It is much more than just “hello,” being closer to a blessing than to a simple greeting. It was Jesus’ first words to the disciples each time that he appeared to them in the closed room after the Resurrection. From time immemorial it has been a standard practice for Jews as the Sabbath approaches on Friday to greet each other with *Shabbat shalom* (שַׁבָּת שָׁלוֹם), “Sabbath peace.”¹ Like so many translated words, however, *shalom* means far more than its English equivalent, which is usually interpreted to mean lack of conflict.² *Shalom* in the Bible means well-being, safety, harmony, and feeling that all in life is as it should be. This is what Saint Paul was talking about when he used the phrase, “the peace of God which passes all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). Most of us have experienced this feeling occasionally, but it is brief. It usually lasts only a moment, then all our worldly cares come rushing back. It has been described as a brief preview of heaven.

Shalom is one of a family of three Hebrew words based on the root S-L-M (ש-ל-ם). The other two are “*shalem*” (שָׁלַם), meaning “whole,” “complete,” or “undivided,” and *shillem* (שָׁלַם), meaning

¹ Jesus and his disciples spoke Aramaic and the Gospels are written in Greek. Even so, the Hebrew greeting was standard even in those days.

² In the New Testament, it is the Greek *Eirene* (Εἰρήνη) rather than *Shalom*. *Eirene* is a translation of *Shalom*, and the Greek word carries the same nuances as the Hebrew, meaning far more than just lack of conflict.

“to pay,” “to compensate,” or “to make restitution.” This third word is very important to the concept of peace, in that it implies that feeling of well-being that comes when one’s debts, monetary, moral, or religious, are paid in full. This is an important concept in both Jewish and Christian theologies of sin, atonement, and forgiveness.¹

Shalom should not be equated with its cousin *Shalvah* (שלוח). This also means peace, but in a narrower sense. It means peacefulness, tranquility, prosperity, and serene security. It is, in a sense, a specialized aspect of *shalom*. Both words are used many times in the Bible, as in Psalm 122:7, “May there be peace (*shalom*) within your walls and tranquility (*shalvah*) within your citadels.”

In the Church’s liturgy it is easy to take the concept of peace for granted because not only do we hear the word frequently, but it seems so appropriate in the worship of God. However, peace is not something passive that simply happens to be around us from time to time. For it truly to exist it requires awareness, concentration, and the willingness to work for it actively. Many Eastern religions focus on this broader meaning of peace, trying to achieve it through meditation and self-discipline. The next time we hear “peace” in a blessing, greeting, or charge (as in: “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,”) we should stop and think about what it really means. Only then will its true value become apparent.

Richard R. Losch+

The Hyksos and Israelite Slavery

In the 18th century BC, near the end of the Middle Bronze Age, a warrior band of Canaanites migrated into Egypt and managed to gain power. They ruled the Lower Kingdom (the northern portion of Egypt) for over 200 years. They were originally from the region that would later be called Judah. They were a Semitic people related to the Hebrews, although they had no known social or political connection with them. We do not know what they called themselves,

¹ S-L-M is also the root of the common ancient and modern city name, Salem. The original meaning of the name “Jerusalem” is unclear, but it almost certainly contains the root for “peace.” It was originally a Jebusite (Canaanite) city, and the Canaanite word for peace is *shallem*. Throughout history the holy city of Jerusalem has often been called Salem. Most modern cities of that name were named in reference to Jerusalem.

but the Egyptian records call them Hyksos, meaning foreign invaders. The 3rd century BC Egyptian historian Manetho wrote that they invaded from the south when the Egyptian government was weak and in disarray, violently grabbing the power of the throne. Other writers indicate that they may have simply infiltrated the weak government until they were able to usurp power for themselves in a coup. In the 6th century BC, the Egyptian noble who would eventually become Pharaoh Ahmos I raised a rebellion and expelled the Hyksos. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, they then returned to Canaan, calling themselves Jebusites, and built a city that they named Jerusalem. In the late 11th century BC King David captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it his capital.

There is a theory that the expulsion of the Hyksos was a prime factor in the enslavement of the Israelites. From the time of Jacob, the Israelites had been living in Egypt in the land of Goshen, and were prospering and multiplying rapidly. As the family of Joseph, Jacob and his retinue were originally warmly welcomed into Egypt. However, as the Israelites grew and prospered, the Egyptians, whose culture was essentially xenophobic, very likely became increasingly nervous about their presence. The Israelites, being fellow Semites, would have been warmly treated by the Hyksos, and this certainly did not endear them to the Egyptians. Once the Semitic Hyksos were expelled and Egyptians regained power, it is reasonable that they wanted to do everything possible to subdue and control the Semitic Israelites, who had undoubtedly been favored by the Hyksos. This is pure hypothesis, but it is a reasonable explanation for the Egyptians' sudden change from friendship to enmity with the Israelites. The chronology between the historical records and the biblical account is close enough to make this a plausible hypothesis.

Richard R. Losch+

Veneration of Saints and Relics

The Orthodox and other various Catholic branches of the Christian Church have often been accused of worshipping saints and relics. While these may play an important part in the spiritual life of the Church, it is untrue to say that they are worshipped. Worship is for God alone, and any variation from that is a violation of the First Commandment. Admittedly, there may be some ignorant people who slip over the line, but if so, however well-intentioned, they are

in heresy and in danger of mortal sin. Some of the confusion comes from the normal change in language over the ages. Centuries ago, to worship simply meant to respect or honor. In England to this day a judge in court is addressed as “Your Worship,” just as in America we address a judge as “Your Honor.” Today, particularly in American English, the term “worship” has taken on the implication of honoring a deity. Traditionally, however, it has no such meaning.

Another similar evolution of a word is the word “to pray.” Traditionally, it simply meant to ask. Today, again particularly in American English, it has taken on the implication of addressing a deity. When we pray to the saints, we are not addressing them as deities. We are asking for their help or guidance just as we might ask a living friend for the same thing. No one gets upset if you ask a friend to pray for Uncle Harry, who is sick. But ask Saint Jude to pray for him, and someone will accuse you of being an idolater. I see no difference between asking my neighbors in the church for prayer and asking my spiritual neighbors in heaven for prayer.

To venerate is not the same as to worship in the modern sense of that word. Veneration is nothing more than the showing of great respect, honor, and sometimes emotional attachment to something or someone. To venerate the saints is to honor them for their spiritual achievements. It is not to elevate them to a position of deity.

It is much the same with relics. A relic is some object that has a close association with something or someone that we venerate. Relics are not unique to Christianity. They are universal, and they pervade all aspects of society, not just religion. For example, how many people do you know who have a locket containing a tress of the hair of a loved one? Kissing a photograph of a departed loved one is veneration, not idolatry. I have several pairs of cufflinks, but the one my father gave me is special. The stole that was presented to me at my ordination means far more to me than any of the other stoles that I use. These are relics, and the fact that they mean something special to us means that we venerate them. This is not idolatry.

Anything that is worthy is also subject to abuse. There is no denying that the Church badly abused the concept of relics of the saints, especially during the Middle Ages. Where there is money to be made, there will always be people who will make it dishonestly. During the Middle Ages, crusaders went into battle carrying relics for which they had paid a fortune, and some of them, we now realize, were ridiculously fraudulent. These included vials containing the

tears that Jesus shed at the grave of Lazarus; vials containing the blood that he shed on the cross; vials containing the spittle that he used to heal the blind man; strings from Jesus' tassel that the woman touched to be healed; fragments of bread and fish from the feeding of the 5,000; and the list goes on and on. Today these sound almost laughable, but people took them very seriously a thousand years ago.¹ Today, the Church is much more cautious about what it accepts as valid relics, and also about how they are used. Relics have no spiritual or metaphysical powers. Like statues and icons, they serve strictly to focus our attention on the saint and his or her achievements. That is no different than feeling comfort from a possession or photograph of someone we loved who is now departed from us.

The Church places relics into several classifications. A Dminical relic is something that was directly in contact with Jesus, such as a fragment of the True Cross. Most of these are dubious and suspect. A first-class relic is a part of a saint's body, such as a lock of hair, a bone fragment, and the like. A second-class relic is something that was possessed by a saint, such as an item of clothing or a prayer book. A third-class relic is something that was associated with a saint, such as the pew that he sat in at chapel, some religious item that he blessed, and so on.

The importance of a relic is not that it has any intrinsic value or metaphysical power, but that it serves to focus our attention and thoughts on the saint's virtues that we hope to emulate. Attributing any greater power than that to them is dangerously close to idolatry. Even the relics from the Middle Ages that we now consider ludicrous served a value to those who carried them. Saint Thomas Aquinas taught that the value of relics is subjective. It is not important whether a relic really is what it means to the beholder. When you gaze on a fragment of the True Cross, if to you that is the Cross, then it serves its purpose. If to someone else it is nothing but a bit of wood, it has no more meaning than a bit of wood. A scoffer once said of a fragment of the tibia of Saint Francis, "If you put all the fragments of his tibia together, he'd have a thousand legs." Someone

¹ Hitler was very superstitious. There was a branch of the SS whose sole job was to search for the steel tip of the lance that the centurion used to pierce Jesus' side on the Cross. This was an important relic in the Crusades, and the Crusades believed that whoever carried it would be victorious in battle. Hitler believed that if he could find it, he would win the war.

responded, "All the better to walk to heaven with, my son."

Be cautious about taking the validity of relics too seriously, but also be cautious about scoffing too quickly. Anything that serves to focus our thoughts and actions more closely on God and on Christian virtues serves a valid purpose in leading us to salvation.

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

A condominium is more than just an apartment that is co-owned by both the building owner and the resident. Originally the word meant a territory co-owned by two or more nations.¹ One of these is Pheasant Island in the Bidasoa River between France and Spain. The two-acre island has changed ownership over 700 times. It has no residents, and visitors are banned. At the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648, France and Spain drew up a treaty whereby the island's ownership would be transferred regularly from one nation to the other as a token of perpetual peace between the two. The only sign of humanity on the island is a marble monument commemorating the peace treaty of 1648. Visitors are forbidden so that it cannot become a tourist attraction that generates revenue for either country. Every six months, delegates from each nation go there and transfer ownership of the island from one nation to the other.

Richard R. Losch+

Jesus or Yeshua?

Many Messianic Jews² and a few Christian purists insist that Jesus should be called Yeshua, his Hebrew-Aramaic name, rather than the Graeco-English form Jesus. *Yeshua* (ישוע) is a short form of the

¹ In 1961, 12 nations ratified the Antarctic Treaty, agreeing that no territory on the Antarctic continent may be owned by a single nation, but that the entire continent should be the property of all the nations on Earth. This made Antarctica the largest condominium in history. The original signers included the United States and the USSR, and China joined in 1985.

² Messianic Jews are Jews who believe that Jesus is the Messiah, yet continue to practice the traditional Jewish faith in most other respects. Some believe that he is the Son of God and the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, and others believe that he is the Messiah prophesied by the Old Testament prophets—a human anointed by God, but not divine.

Hebrew name *Yehoshua* (יהושע), which means “God Saves.” The Anglicized form is Joshua. When *Yeshua* was translated into Greek, the *lingua franca* of the world at the time, it came out as *Iesous* (Ἰησοῦς). Greek has no *sh* sound, and it need a gender ending (-ous). When the Greek was translated into Latin, it came out *Jesus*. In early medieval Latin, an initial “*I*” followed by a vowel developed a curly tail and became “*J*”, and thus we have *Jesus*.¹ Jesus, Joshua, Yeshua, and Yehoshua are all the same name in Hebrew. In all Greek translations of both the Old and New Testaments, the names Joshua and Jesus are rendered *Iesous*. If you are going to be pedantic and insist that Jesus be called Yeshua, then you must also call John *Iohanan*, James *Iakov*, and Mary *Miriam*. Jesus is the Savior of all mankind, not just the Jews, and thus it is appropriate that his name is pronounced differently in dozens of different languages.

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

One of the most popular Muppets is Miss Piggy. Few are aware that she has a real name, which she revealed on two 1979 episodes of *The Muppet Show*. “Miss Piggy” is a nickname for Pigathia Lee. This is from the Greek *Pigathios* (Πιγαθιος), River of Passion. She is also a fashion designer, selling her lifestyle brand “Moi” on QVC. This included TV commercials for the line.

Richard R. Losch+

Nazirites and Nazarenes

In the Book of Judges we read about Samson the Nazirite. Jesus is called a Nazarene, People have often tried to find a connection between the two words. There have been some interesting proposals of a common root, but if we go back to the Hebrew, we find that there is no connection whatever. A Nazirite is someone who has made a vow to God, usually for a specified period of time, but sometimes for life (Num. 6:1-21). The Nazirite vow is somewhat like the Third Order vow of a monastic community, in which the individual leads a disciplined secular life and may marry, but is under

¹ For a couple of centuries it was treated as no more than a fancy flourish on the letter *I*. In 1524 it was recognized as a separate letter and add it to the alphabet, and the *J* pronunciation that we now use became common.

obligation to meet certain spiritual requirements on a regular basis. A Third Order vow is usually for life. The Jewish Nazirite vow could be for a specified term—anything from a few days to several years. Among other things, it required that the individual abstain from any grape product, never cut his hair during the term of the vow, and never allow himself to become ritually unclean by touching a corpse. The most famous Nazirite in the Bible is Samson.¹ A Nazarene, on the other hand, is nothing more than a person from Nazareth,² although the word is sometimes used to mean a follower of Jesus. In his Annunciation account, Matthew (2:23) says, “He shall be called a Nazarene.” This had nothing to do with Nazarites, but simply meant that he would be called a Nazarene instead of a Bethlehemite, even though he was born in Bethlehem.

The reason for the confusion is nothing more than that the two words are victims of translation. They both look similar, but their original roots are quite different—even the Hebrew spelling is not the same. The letter that we transliterate as *z* in both words is different. In *Nazirite*, the letter is *zayin* (ז), while in *Nazarene* it is *tsade* (צ),³ and they are pronounced differently. The former comes from the root *nazir* (נזר), set apart; the latter comes from the town name Nazareth (נצרת). This confusion arose in the second century BC when the Hebrew scriptures were first translated into Greek (the Septuagint). In Greek, both words look similar. Even then scholars began to look for connection, and the later translations into Latin and English, which also use only a *z*, added to the confusion.

Richard R. Losch+

*"It has always been easy to hate and destroy. To cherish
and to build is much more difficult."*

– Queen Elizabeth II

¹ Samson killed many people in his lifetime, but he may have honored his Nazirite vow by not touching the corpse after he had killed the person.

² Pilate's inscription on the cross was, “*Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudiorum*,” “Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews.”

³ There is no Greek or Roman letter equivalent to *tsade* (צ), which is properly pronounced *ts*, like the *z* in *Nazi*. Again, there is no linguistic connection whatever between the words *Nazarene* and *Nazi*.

A Touch of Trivia

Seventeenth century hygiene was poor at best, but probably one of the filthiest places in history was what was allegedly the most magnificent. Louis XIV ruled France for 72 years, from 1643 to 1715. “The Sun King” is imagined to have lived in lavish splendor that exceeded that of any other monarch in history. To keep a close eye on his troublesome aristocracy, he required that all the top nobles and their families live in his glorious 2300-room palace at Versailles. It was risky to disobey the king, so almost all lived there. Versailles was sumptuously furnished and decorated, and its higher-class residents were provided with luxurious accommodations, beautifully groomed gardens, and lavish meals and entertainment.¹ It sounds wonderful, except that most gas station latrines are cleaner and smell better than Versailles. About 5,000 people from the aristocracy to the lowest servants lived there, and the sanitation facilities could not even begin to serve that many people properly. Almost all the residents used chamber pots rather than having toilets, and it was common practice to dump them out the windows or often directly into the hallways. Oral hygiene was almost nonexistent. Most of the nobility in those days had rotting teeth and gum disease because of their rich sugar-laden diet. Just the breath of hundreds of such people gathered in one place must have been asphyxiating. Bathing among the residents of the palace was almost unknown (Louis bathed only once or twice a year) and they covered their body odors with perfumes. To this day, the French are the world’s leading perfumers. Foreign ambassadors visiting the palace reported that the stench was almost unbearable. Historians believe that Louis did this intentionally to humiliate his nobility and thus keep them under control.² “It’s good to be the king” may be true for some, but not so much for those who were required to live with King Louis XIV.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ As in all royal palaces, servants’ quarters were small, crowded, and usually squalid. All the resident servants, however, were given simple meals and housing. Many servants and most of the soldiers lived in town.

² There is no historical evidence to support the widespread legend that Louis passed an edict in 1715 banning defecation on the staircases. The first reference to this anywhere is over a century later. It is almost certainly a Washington-and-the-cherry-tree type of fabrication.