



The S. Stephen

The monthly news at S. Stephen's Church in Providence
November/December, 2006

Vol. 6, No. 3

All Saints Harvest Supper

This year's All Saints Harvest Supper was held on Saturday, November 4 in the Great Hall. About forty people attended including a number of children who, as it turned out, became the crowning glory of that delightful evening.

The tables were set with candles and colorful cloths festooned with ivy, nuts, berries, flowers and red and yellow autumn leaves. Everyone brought food. The delicious menu included: roast chickens, ham, roasted vegetables, a rice casserole, yam casseroles, salad, and bread and cheese. We had wine to drink and pies, cakes and candies with coffee.

Everyone also brought socks, scarves, mittens and toiletries to give to our needy guests on New Year's Day at our Annual New Year's Dinner. Still more gifts are needed before the event. It's not too late for you to contribute. Keep watch for information about the kinds of gifts needed and where to bring them.

The highlight of the evening came after dessert when the children (costumed as Saints) stood at the front of the room and told us about the saints they represented: Katie and Emily MacLean, Jason Ashley, Korrie and Devaughn Hooks, Deslin, Ladwaune and Taighee Edwards, and DeOnte Latimer delighted everyone in the room.



The Society of Mary: Our Lady of Providence

At its November meeting, Our Lady of Providence Ward of the Society of Mary made plans for the following church year. We wish to share the following plans with the parish:

A box for intercessions will be placed near the statue of Our Lady in the chapel. All are invited to write intercessions and deposit them there. A number of these intercessions (as space allows) will be offered without names during the recitation of the rosary at the monthly meeting of the ward: 9 a.m. on the first Saturday of every month. The rosary, in addition to being a meditative devotion is an intercessory one. The shrine of Our Lady

of Walsingham in England offers intercessions in this way. After these have been prayed by the ward, they will be passed on to the Thursday morning Prayer Group for use at their next meeting. Watch for further details.

We will be showing videos about some of the famous apparitions of Mary in various places: Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe and the like. At our December meeting, we will begin viewing *The Song of Bernadette*. In addition, we will inaugurate a feature in the *S. Stephen* about various shrines where Our Lady is honored.

Some time in the spring, we hope to sponsor a conference presenting Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Anglican perspectives of Mary. In recent years, Our Lady has become a focus of ecumenical interest among Christian denominations and Churches are growing closer as they deepen their devotion to her faithful witness to her Son.

If you wish to learn more about the Society of Mary, come to our December meeting, Saturday the second, beginning with Morning Prayer at 9 o'clock; Mass at 9:30 followed by a guided recitation of the rosary, then breakfast and the meeting. All are welcome. For further information, call Phoebe Pettingell at 274-3090.

Phoebe Pettingell

From the 19th Century: Words of Wisdom for a Polarized Church

I think that one of the greatest dangers...is that people may lose charity by thinking evil of those who take a different side from themselves.... We know that our object has been the honor of God, and our motive the love of God. Now when we find people reviling that which we do from such a motive and for such an object, it is often hard for us to believe that they are animated by the same motive as ourselves, and striving for the same object. Yet such is undoubtedly the case. With regard to many of our most strenuous opponents we know it to be so by all the tokens which we could desire; in few do we know anything to the contrary; and therefore with regard to the majority, we are bound to believe in their sincerity. We shall thus be kept from the most unchristian tendency to look out eagerly for faults in others and to rejoice in such faults when they appear; and moreover we shall know that on both sides the strife is for the same thing, the one object of our lives—the honor and the glory of God. Hence without abating in

the very least our own efforts to advance that object in the way we conceive to be according to His will, we shall the more rest assured that as both sides are seeking to forward the same objects, it must eventually, by God's help, be attained. It will keep us certain of the ultimate result and therefore comparatively indifferent to the intermediate steps.

Alexander Harriot Mackonochie, writing to his own parish in 1867.

Alexander Harriot Mackonochie (1825-1887) was a leader in the Anglo Catholic Ritualist movement who served the parish of St. Alban's in Holborn (London), a slum parish, through years of anti-Catholic feeling. Yet at the height of persecution (he was eventually suspended for such things as elevating the chalice during the prayer of consecration), he insisted that his parish treat opponents with compassion and love.

Father Alexander's letter to the parish



My dear people:

The month of November is off to a good start. We celebrated the Solemnity of All Saints with joyful liturgical ceremony on 5 November. The celebrations actually got underway the previous evening with the All Saints Harvest Supper, attended by about forty people, and detailed elsewhere in this issue of *The S. Stephen*. I was almost in tears as I watched and listened to the children tell the stories of the saints they had dressed up as. Clearly, the Catholic faith is alive and well among the young people of our parish.

On Thursday 2 November, All Souls Day, we observed the Commemoration of All Faithful Departed with a Sung Requiem Mass in the presence of the Catafalque (a symbolic representation of a coffin with bier lights). You may have noticed that the candles in the bier lights are an amber color. They are made of unbleached wax—an old tradition for Requiems that we have revived here in the past couple of years.

By the time you receive this letter, our Remembrance Sunday Requiem will have taken place on 12 November. At the time of writing, I am looking forward to it intensely, though not without regret and sadness at the continuing loss of life due to wars and conflicts in our world. As Saint Augustine reminded us in the late fourth century, for Christians war may be a necessary evil—to prevent worse evils—but it is always nonetheless

still an evil and never something to be idealized or glorified.

On Friday and Saturday 10 and 11 November, also, I will have been in New York City attending the annual Council Meeting and Mass of the American branch of the Guild of All Souls at the Church of the Resurrection. The President of the English branch of the Guild, the Bishop of Richborough, will be preaching; and I am looking forward to making his acquaintance as well as seeing a number of old friends—chiefly other Anglo-Catholic rectors—on the Guild Council. Next year, we shall be hosting the 2007 Annual Meeting and Mass of the Guild here at S. Stephen's on Saturday 28 April.

On Wednesday 22 November at 5:30 pm and Thursday 23 November at 9:00 am, we shall be offering Mass in the Lady Chapel with the appointed readings and prayers for Thanksgiving Day. I am taking my remaining vacation for 2006 during that weekend, so I will not be around. But for those who are in town, it is a wonderful opportunity to come to Mass to thank God for all his blessings—the purpose of the day, after all—before continuing on to football games, family gatherings, and turkey dinners.

Finally, two events are coming up in early December, which I earnestly commend to your calendars: the Advent Lessons and Carols on Sunday 3 December at 5:30 pm; and the Advent Quiet Day on Saturday 9 December. Mother Miriam of the Community of Saint Mary will be our speaker at the Quiet Day; and she will be joining us at Sunday services the next day as well.

This letter comes, as always, with all best wishes and prayers.

Your priest and pastor,

Fr. John D. Alexander

Liturgical Music

December, 2006

Unless otherwise indicated, the following are sung at the Solemn High Mass on Sundays at 10:00 a.m.

3 DECEMBER--ADVENT I
Missa brevis "Rorate coeli desuper"
.....Joseph Haydn
Vigilate.....William Byrd

3 DECEMBER--ADVENT LESSONS & CAROLS (5:30 P.M.)
Music by Byrd, Distler, Esquivel, O. Gibbons, Ledger, Palestrina, Parsons, Weelkes

10 DECEMBER--ADVENT II
Messe "Se la face ay pale"
.....Guillaume Dufay
Vox clamantis in deserto.....Juan Esquivel

17 DECEMBER--ADVENT III
Missa Aquitainiae.....Gerald Hendrie
O Thou, the central orb.....Charles Wood

24 DECEMBER-ADVENT IV
Messe basse.....Gabriel Fauré
Gabriel's Message.....John Cook

24 DECEMBER--NATIVITY OF OUR LORD & SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST (10:30 P.M.)
Missa ad precesepse.....George Malcolm
O ye little flock.....John Amner
In the bleak midwinterHarold Darke

31 DECEMBER--CHRISTMAS I
Office of Holy Communion...John Merbecke

Benedict made it clear that the desire for good is no excuse for the exercise of evil in its behalf...To become what we hate—as mean as the killers, as obsessed as the haters—is neither the goal nor the greatness of the spiritual life.

Sr. Joan Chittister

S. Stephen's Prayer Group

meets Thursdays at 12:30 at Deborah Lawrence's home. For prayers for yourself or for others, please contact Deborah at 621-3630, Cathy Bledsoe, at 246-2194, or send an email to vorkar@cox.net.

All are welcome to attend!

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Phone: 401-421-6702,
Email: office@sstephens.necoxmail.com
Fax: 401-421-6703
Editor: Karen Vorbeck Williams, 434-6723 vorkar@cox.net
Contributors this month: Phoebe Pettingell, Brian Ehlers, Ed Zeldin and the Rector
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www.sstephens.org

The Advent Wreath



The Advent wreath is of German and Scandinavian traditions. It developed out of the simple use of an evergreen spray of fir, spruce or balsam placed near the hearth for its aromatic qualities. The ever-greenness of the wreath reminds us that the life offered in Christ's coming is forever, not bounded by times or seasons. The greens have come out of the winter where most

other living things sleep or die back, but its life continues.

The Advent candles are intermingled with the evergreen spray. Of course, candles and their light have always been associated with the beauty and mystery of divinity, and have been from ancient times. The warmth and the glow and the fierceness of fire all remind us of qualities of God: our God is a consuming fire, so ages and ages of sages and prophets have taught.

Now the true light, which lights the way for all people, is coming into the world, once and for all. The wonder of God entering into his creation is represented in the marvel of light and fire. Milton's paean to the sun is a beautiful expression of this glory:

*Hail holy light, offspring of heav'n first-born,
Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam
May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light,
And never but in unapproach'd light
Dwelt from Eternite, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.*

Paradise Lost III. 1f.

The use of four candles, one for each Sunday as the light grows, is well established. Various meanings have been attached to each as instructive: 1. The prophecy candle, announcing the yearning and anticipation of the people for a Savior; 2. The Bethlehem candle, reminding of the specificity of God's self-revelation to the Jews, through the house and lineage of David; 3. The Shepherd's candle, which can recall the lowliness of the Christ's first worshippers, how he came first to the meek and lowly of the people of the land; 4. The Angels' candle fulfills the chorus of light and splendor proclaiming the pure spiritual grace of heaven intersecting human life.

The greatest and most glorious guest imaginable wants to come to your home this season, and preparing for so supreme an honor is our joy and service in this place. Thanks be to God!

*The Rev. Jess L. Reeves
Bethesda-by-the-Sea, Palm Beach, Florida
The Anglican Digest
Advent-Christmas-Epiphany, 2005*

Review by Ed Zeldin

Atheist du Jour:

Letter to a Christian Nation

by Sam Harris

Alfred A. Knopf (2006)

A firebrand intellectual named Sam Harris has lately become notorious for his public pronouncements on religion. When he gives lectures he is obliged to have bodyguards and other security measures available, and generally he keeps his whereabouts hidden. His first book, provocatively titled *The End of Faith* (2004) was an all out attack on religious belief. As a witness to the destruction of the World Trade Center, he realized that this horrific act was in large measure religiously motivated or at least rationalized in Islamic religious terms and was supported and committed by fanatical believers. He imagined the possibility of a world conflagration born of the hostile encounter between a radicalized Islamic world and a United States of America whose government had become co-opted by right-wing Christian fundamentalists. Given the possibility of this scenario, he sees our current situation as a moral and intellectual emergency, in which whole nations might be willing to annihilate one another over mutually incompatible dogmatic beliefs which, as many reasonable people would maintain, have no evidence to support them.

The End of Faith set off a firestorm of argument between believers and non-believers. (See the discussion forum at www.samharris.org) It's likely that this man, who has taken on the mission of saving the world from itself by publishing his ideas and starting a foundation to combat religion, is going to be increasingly influential. If he could have his way, organized religion as we know it would be prohibited. Depending upon political vicissitudes, the policy results of his ideas could have a long-range effect on the life of the Church, and for this reason alone, it's worth putting a brake on our initial indignation, to consider what he is saying. We may disagree with much of it, but he is, if nothing else, a reasonable and very smart individual whose probing questions and feisty style may prompt us to more deeply evaluate what our faith means for us, and for the world.

Letter to a Christian Nation is his summary response (barely ninety-five pages) to many of the objections from Christians who were outraged or offended by his first book. He states "The truth is that many who claim to be transformed by Christ's love are deeply, even murderously, intolerant of criticism...such hatred draws considerable support from the Bible. How do I know this? The most disturbed of my correspondents always cite chapter and verse." His book is an attempt "to demolish the intellectual and moral pretensions of Christianity in its most committed forms." In this review I intend only to outline his main ideas and point to a few issues I don't think he adequately addresses. I would encourage everyone to read this book for him/herself and to be prepared for a challenging experience. Christian faith was never meant to be easy. I believe we are obliged to be able to dialogue with those who have no faith at all. This, after all, is what The Great Commission enjoins us to do.

Many of his contentions have a familiar ring. He maintains that religions are holdovers from eras when people were

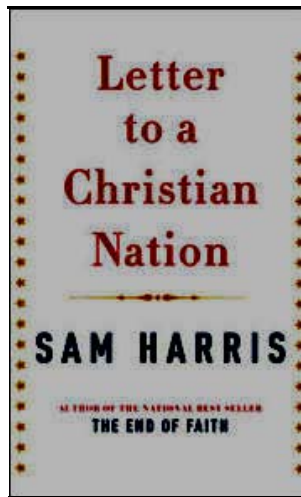
basically ignorant of how the world worked. However useful they may have been then, they have no place in a world where rational scientific knowledge and discourse have rolled back the frontiers of ignorance. Progress will continue through secular politics and scientific research. Each major religion in its orthodox form insists it alone is true, without any apparent basis on which to adjudicate this claim. The Bible (both Old and New Testaments) and Koran are tendentious books which, if the faithful read them more thoroughly, would horrify them with the seeming endorsement of violent and destructive behavior they appear to endorse. They are also strewn with inconsistency and internal contradiction so that they can be made to support almost any point of view. People who think of themselves as religious moderates are arbitrarily “cherry-picking” the parts of those books that appeal to them, in violation of the true faith. Bloodshed and inhuman behavior on a massive scale have, in certain eras, including our own, drawn inspiration from sacred scriptures. And of course, he adds that the evidence to support scripturally based beliefs is wanting or flimsy at best. Is there any stronger basis for Christian belief than there is for belief in Zeus or Poseidon?

When it comes to questions of morality, which he defines as “questions of happiness and suffering”, he sees the scriptures as being deficient guides in this area. He adduces the example of slavery. While all civilized nations now agree that slavery is wrong and immoral, there is nothing in the Bible that would have led them to this belief.

In any event, behaving morally does not require belief in unverifiable events, and there are more than enough examples of people who behave morally because to them it is a self-evident human obligation, while the behavior of the Church itself has at times been flagrantly immoral. Against those who object that the greatest atrocities of all time have been committed by amoral totalitarian dictators who were avowed enemies of religion, he maintains that their absolutist dogmatism was no different in kind from the dogmatism of the major religions themselves. (He is even willing to take seriously Hitler’s professed self-identification as a Christian). He insists that shared religious beliefs lead inescapably to life-destroying dogma, and that the net result is necessarily more harmful than beneficial.

He lambastes Christians for standing in the way of medical advances such as stem cell research and contraception and HIV prophylaxis, thus increasing the suffering of millions of people by elevating dogmatic considerations over human life itself. He is unsparing in his critique of Intelligent Design. He takes us to task for apparently being willing to suspend principles of rational discourse in the sphere of religion. Religious moderates, in his view, are merely lending aid and succor to fanatics and fundamentalists by declaring matters of faith to be off limits to intellectual honesty. In his eyes they are using their religion self-indulgently, mainly as a source of comfortable consolation. He has nothing but contempt for them.

I hope I’ve been able to show the basic tenor of this work. This review isn’t meant to be exhaustive. I want to advance a few thoughts in response to Harris’ position. In positing



The book was released in September 2006. In October it entered the New York Times Best Seller list at number seven.

his ideal world free of religion, Harris is supposing with no evidence whatever, that society over the past several millennia and at present would have been better without it. Better for whom, and how does he know this? The idea is purely hypothetical. For all we know, without the humanizing effects of an evolved religious faith, civilization itself may never have taken root, and he, had he lived under those conditions, might have been incapable of thinking his thoughts about morality. We might still be in a state of barbarism. It is arguable that the Church itself was one of the primary foundations and organizers of Western civilization. Though he approvingly cites many modern European countries as having high standards of living while being relatively free of religious observance, he doesn’t want to look at the moral decay that has beset his own country while religious observance has fallen more and more by the way side. He also appears to be oblivious of the startling resurgence of Christianity in the Global South and even in East Asia, even as those areas of the

globe are modernizing. According to a recent article in the *National Review*, “Guatemala has the largest share of new Protestants in the world.” And, just as Max Weber, author of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, would have predicted, this spiritual transformation is having profound cultural and economic effects on Guatemalan society. It may do more for modernization than the World Bank ever could.

In speaking of religious believers he set up a straw man, a Bible-thumping fundamentalist of the most primitive kind, as his target. He assumes that the more fundamentalist, the more authentic and “committed.” Arguably, the opposite is true. Religions after all are not mere disembodied articles of literalist belief or collections of isolated scriptural quotations. They are living communities of faith that have evolved through the lives of many generations, over millennia. True, some of this evolution has taken destructive forms (we are fallen creatures) but some has led to the deepest wisdom, self-sacrifice and compassion imaginable. In Judaism, the Mishnaic sages, who were certainly no religious moderates, recognized that the written and oral tradition they received was in continual need of interpretation in order that it be most relevant to the real life of the community. They were not literalists. (They went so far as to declare that even if they heard a voice from heaven telling them what the proper interpretation was, they would still be obligated to arrive at their own decision.) I should think that Holy Church takes upon itself the same mediating function. The sages and the saints could not have lived their holy lives without this organic relation to scripture and to the Church, which in turn enriches its collective life through them. Their legacy is passed on to us through sacraments, prayer, fellowship and study.

On the question of morality, which according to Harris is simply a means of bringing about an increase of happiness and a mitigation of suffering, his viewpoint seems to be purely utilitarian. He denies any deeper grounding for morality than our psychology, which he then wants to further reduce to “the laws of the mind.” He won’t acknowledge that “unearned

suffering can be redemptive” (Martin Luther King Jr.) or that it can at least deepen one’s sense of purpose in life. The happiness he talks of could just as well be shallow, self-absorbed, and even a direct outcome of sin. Harris’s bright-as-a-penny utopian rationalism seems to know nothing of sin. Christianity is grounded in our fervent desire to be free of sin. Sin is not a misfiring of neural circuits, not mere error or fallibility; it is a willful violation of a moral order that has its source in the sacred. Religion is mankind’s earnest communal response to the sacred and as a religion, Christianity is an attempt, never entirely successful, to live a life suffused by the sacred, and by the kind of love that Jesus enacts and embodies – a holy life. If the “evidence” shows anything at all about this, it is that we are in need of help beyond ourselves to live that life. Our reliance upon that help is a defining characteristic of faith.

Here I imagine Harris would say that appealing to the idea of faith begs the fundamental question. “Faith in what?” he might ask. He equates faith with naïve credulity, a willingness to be duped, even deluded. Yet faith can also be understood as a way of knowing the world, not through detached observation, but through engagement at our very deepest levels. Our soul encounters the source of all souls, which is God. For Harris, who is now doing a doctorate in neuroscience in order to show that faith is just another pattern of brain activation, this way of speaking is nonsense, and teaching such notions to the young amounts to a “ludicrous obscenity”. To use an analogy, Harris seems to be a man who can hear musical notes, but is deaf to the harmony and melody they carry. (Freud, another renowned atheist, was of a similar constitution.) Unlike the great psychologist of religion William James, he certainly shows little interest in the real personal experience of believers, reducing this, as he does, to a caricature of true religion.

In his insistence on the primacy of standard logic and plain evidence, he seems oblivious to the evidence of the sublime and the transcendent which are all around us, and within us, and to which the scriptures themselves point. I must say that one is either aware of this as a living fact, or one isn’t. Harris isn’t, and as an outsider to the world of faith, *he cannot understand what it is*. His rationalist categories prevent this. (He is like the “second son” in the Passover Seder service who asks, “What is the meaning of all these customs and ceremonies to you?”, on which the Sages comment “In saying ‘to you’ and not ‘to us’, he separates himself from the community. Had he been a slave in Egypt, he would not have been liberated.”). So out of touch is he with the actual religious experience of Christians that he can say “An average Christian, in an average church, listening to an average Sunday sermon has achieved a level of arrogance simply unimaginable in scientific discourse.” What church does he have in mind? Does he not know that in every Mass a priest confesses and begs forgiveness of sin, that the worshippers ask for divine mercy and that throughout the Catholic liturgy there is an abiding sense of man’s unworthiness to stand before God and entreat Him – that only “through the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior” can we live in hope?

When I became aware, in my own life, of a pressing need to understand Christianity, I knew I could not do it through reading and study exclusively; I had to enter the Christian life, to experience it from within. But I didn’t stop there; I knew that there is no Christian life in isolation, so I became a member of

this parish, and in so doing, a member of the Body of Christ. If Harris wants to be reasonable with Christians, let him be reasonable after taking such a step. He will find himself in the company of many other deeply moral, profoundly intelligent and thoughtful people like himself. Without this he remains an outsider, a promoter of a rationalistic form of dogmatism, for which there is no reasonable basis, and which cannot promote any trustworthy social order. (In his ideal society, what would be the judicial penalty for teaching religion?)

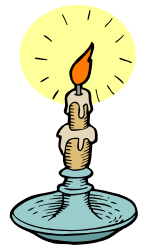
As Christians, we can be both thoughtful and faithful as we bear witness to the truth of the Gospel. At S. Stephen’s we are fortunate that our Anglican heritage supports this. We can be thankful to Mr. Harris for posing his questions and stimulating our thought. We can also pray for him, and for those who, like him, are trapped in the snares of rationalism. (It’s a rather crude rationalism at that. His Aristotelian logic, invented 2500 years ago in a society still ruled by Zeus, seems to know nothing of recent advances in the study of “many-valued logic,” where “true” and “false” are not the only attributes of a proposition: rather surprising in a writer who has studied philosophy at the graduate level. And of dialectical thinking there is not a trace. Did he miss those classes?)

There is a dark etching by Goya which portrays a dozing man surrounded by a flock of bats and other nightmarish creatures, entitled “The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters.” Some would interpret this image as emblematic of life in the absence of guidance by reason. It’s also possible, however, to interpret that reason itself is a kind of sleep, which can only lead to monstrous outcomes if it is the sole basis for our life. We do not want to go sleepwalking through life. We want to answer the deeply felt call to be fully awake to all its possibilities and dimensions so that we may arrive at our divinely ordained destiny. Our faith is what allows us to perceive the light shining through the darkness, emanating from God, guiding us on our way.



Advent Prayer

Lord Jesus,
Master of both the light and the
darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon
our preparations for Christmas.



We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day.

We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.

We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom.

We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence.

We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.

To you we say, “Come Lord Jesus!”

Amen.

Henri J.M. Nouwen

November 21

Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Religious parents never fail by devout prayer to consecrate their children to God, His divine service and love, both before and after their birth. Some among the Jews, not content with this general consecration of their children, offered them to God in their infancy, by the hands of the priests in the Temple, to be brought up in quarters attached to the Temple, attending the priests and Levites in their sacred ministry. There were special divisions in these lodgings for the women and children dedicated to the divine service. (III Kings 6:5-9) We have examples of this special consecration of children in the person of Samuel, for example. Today the Church celebrates the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple of Jerusalem. It is very probable that the holy prophet Simeon and the prophetess Anna, who witnessed the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, as we read in the second chapter of the Gospel of Saint Luke (verses 25 ff.) had known his mother as a little girl in the Temple and observed her truly unique sanctity.

It is an ancient and very beautiful and inspiring tradition that the Blessed Virgin was thus solemnly offered in the Temple to God at the age of three by her parents, Saint Anne and Saint Joachim. The Gospel tells us nothing of the childhood of Mary.

Here is how Mary's day in the Temple was apportioned, according to Saint Jerome. From dawn until nine in the morning, she prayed; from 9:00 until 3:00 she applied herself to manual work; then she turned again to prayer. She was always the first to undertake night watches, the one most applied to study, the most fervent in the chanting of Psalms, the most zealous in works of charity, the purest among the virgins, her companions, the most perfect in the practice of every virtue.

The Protoevangel of James, the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary, and other apocryphal writings relate that Mary, at the age of three, was brought by her parents to the Temple, in fulfillment of a vow to educate her there. The corresponding feast originated in the Orient, probably in Syria, the home of the apocrypha.

Excerpted from The Lives of The Saints website and the Catholic Encyclopedia.

Antony died in A.D. 356. If he lived to the age of 105, as several ancient authors claim, he was born in 251. We know him through three sources: a collection of sayings, seven letters, and an influential biography written by the patriarch of Alexandria, Athanasius. Antony was a pious boy who lost his parents as a youth. He "left and followed" Christ from the age of 20, divesting himself of his property. Eventually he retreated into the Egyptian desert where he became a wise ascetic.



Centering Prayer Workshop Planned for January

A centering prayer workshop will be held at S. Stephen's Church the morning of Saturday, January 20th. Father Bill Sheehan, an oblate of Mary Immaculate in Lowell, Massachusetts, will lead the six-hour workshop. Father Sheehan lives in the Contemplative Mission Center in Lowell. He has been involved with Father Thomas Keating, OCSO, the founder of Contemplative Outreach since 1983 and gives introductory workshops, and weekend (and longer) retreats on centering prayer.

An introductory workshop on centering prayer provides people with an opportunity to experience this contemplative form of prayer and to learn more about how centering prayer is simply a part of our Christian spiritual tradition. The day will be divided between prayer itself and an introduction to some necessary supporting background from our tradition.

Six weeks of follow-up support will be available for those who want to continue with centering prayer within a communal context. The exact time and dates for these follow-up meetings have not been determined, except that they will immediately follow the January 20th workshop.

Details about lunch during the January 20th workshop shall also come later. Please watch *The S. Stephen* and the *Kalendar* for further information. If you have questions, please call Deborah Lawrence at 621-3630.

While we deliberate, God reigns.
When we decide wisely, God reigns.
When we decide foolishly, God reigns.
When we serve God in humble loyalty, God reigns.
When we serve God self-assertively, God reigns.
When we rebel and seek to withhold our service—
God reigns—the alpha and omega, which is, and
which was, and which is to come, the almighty.
Amen.

*Archbishop William Temple
Lambeth Conference of 1938*

The devils attack first those who have attained a very great measure. They seek by means of pride and vain-glory to turn them against one another. They know that in this way they can cut us off from God, for they know that those who love their neighbors, love God. For this reason, the enemies of virtue sow division in our hearts, that we may be filled with great enmity against each other and not hold any converse with our neighbor, even from a distance.

Anthony, Letters

Our Stewardship Campaign

is in progress and, we are happy to report, many individuals and families at S. Stephen's have responded to the call to increase their pledges by at least 15%.

If you haven't turned in your pledge card yet, this is a reminder. Our beloved church needs YOUR support.

A BIT OF CYNICISM FOR A GOOD CAUSE:

A well-worn one-dollar bill and a similarly distressed twenty-dollar bill arrived at a Federal Reserve Bank to be retired. As they moved along the conveyor belt toward the furnace, they struck up a conversation.

The twenty-dollar bill reminisced about its travels all over the country. "I've had a pretty good life," the twenty proclaimed. "Why I've been to Las Vegas and Atlantic City, the finest restaurants in New York, performances on Broadway, and even a cruise to the Caribbean."

"Wow!" said the one-dollar bill. "You've really had an exciting life!"

"So tell me," says the twenty, "where have you been throughout your lifetime?"

The one dollar bill replies, "Oh, I've been to the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, the Lutheran Church..."

The twenty-dollar bill interrupts, "What's a church?"

Lectionary Bible Study

meets Friday's at 9:30 a.m. in the church library. The Lectionary texts for the coming Sunday are the object of a study led by Father Alexander.

Everyone is welcome!

Truly, my children, I want you to know that there are many who have pursued asceticism throughout their life, but lack of discernment killed them.

Antony, Letters

Visit our website at
www.sstephens.org



Congratulations are in order. This past August **Tonya McArthur**, alto, successfully defended her dissertation, *A Devotion of Resistance: The Revisiting of Female Monasticism in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Literature* at the University of Connecticut. She is now teaching under a one-year appointment at Russell Sage College in Troy, NY, commuting back to Providence for the weekends. Russell Sage is a small liberal arts college, all women, with about 800 students, one of the very few schools left in this country that has a language requirement, two years of French or Spanish for ALL of their undergraduates. However, Tonya says that rumor has it that this will not last much longer. Tonya also teaches courses at their co-ed "sister" school, the Sage College of Albany. The Albany campus is also small, but they have a thriving program in visual and media arts. She is teaching everything from British Literature survey courses and first-year writing/research to Victorian Literature. She is in the market for a job again this year, so the next year is yet to be determined! Tonya's husband **Michael** is teaching beginning, intermediate, and advanced Latin at Wheaton College in Norton, MA.

Congratulations are also in order for our organist and choirmaster, **James Busby**. On Sunday November 17 he quite successfully demonstrated his talent and the capabilities of our completely refurbished organ console during his annual Memorial Organ Recital. This year the recital was offered in memory of Richard Sherman Nutt, Edith Woolsey Nutt, and The Rev'd Alan Peter Maynard. The recital began with *Chaconne from Suite in D minor for unaccompanied violin*. The piece was arranged for organ by John Cook, one time organist of the Church of the Advent, Boston. I doubt if any of the listeners had heard the piece before, but I'm sure they would all like to hear it again! Lovely! The recital ended with a very exciting performance of Joseph Jongen's *Toccata*. James' fingers and feet were all over the keys and pedals at an astounding speed and dexterity and certainly demonstrated his continuing recovery from his cancer. Thanks be to God.

John Whittlesey, baritone, is an occasional singer/soloist with our Schola. (Those of you who have attended a service sung by the Schola of the Fauré Requiem in recent years will recall the rich and lovely baritone solos: *Offertory* and *Libera Me*. John is the soloist.) John is also the founder and artistic director of *Intermezzo*, The New England Chamber Opera Series. (www.intermezzo-opera.org). *Intermezzo* was born out of a vision to produce contemporary chamber opera and bring new and exciting works to the musical life of New England. Chamber opera merges the musical and dramatic flavor of grand opera with the immediacy of art song, performed on a smaller, more intimate scale. James Busby also has a connection with *Intermezzo*. I recently learned that James is Musical Director and Trustee of the group. James and John are now rehearsing to perform Benjamin Britten's *Curlew River* on November 17 and 19 at the Jesuit Urban Center in Boston. (See the web site for details). John is excited that *Intermezzo* has been awarded a \$5,000 grant from the Britten/Pears Foundation to help underwrite production expenses for *Curlew River*. I plan on attending a performance and would be pleased to provide transportation if you'd like to attend too.

KIDS IN CHURCH

I had been teaching my three-year old daughter, Caitlin, the Lord's Prayer for several evenings at bedtime. She would repeat after me the lines from the prayer. Finally, she decided to go solo. I listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word, right up to the end of the prayer:

"Lead us not into temptation," she prayed, "but deliver us from E-mail."

WORSHIP AT S. STEPHEN'S *by the Rev'd John D. Alexander*



Reredos (detail) at S. Stephen's Church in Providence

Note: One of the features of the new parish website that has attracted many (mostly positive) comments is the Worship page. This page represents an attempt to explain some of the basic principles governing our Anglo-Catholic approach to worship and liturgy at S. Stephen's. Following are some excerpts from this page, written during the summer of 2006, and available online at <http://www.sstephens.org/worship.html>.

Worship is central to our life and mission at S. Stephen's. The primary purpose of worship in the Anglo-Catholic tradition is not to entertain, edify, inspire, motivate, or instruct, but rather to render to God *the praise that is his due*. In the process, we may find our hearts, minds, and spirits lifted into God's presence so that we receive a foretaste of heaven. And if we attend worship regularly, we shall grow spiritually and become more and more the persons that God created us to be. But, again, the point of worship is not what we get out of it, but rather what we offer up.

Worship in the Anglo-Catholic tradition is *liturgical*, in that it follows an ordered and predictable pattern. While our liturgy may seem bewildering and confusing to someone attending for the first time, it quickly becomes comfortably familiar to those attending Sunday after Sunday—because most Sundays the same things are said and done in much the same sequence. Paradoxically, this highly structured order of service is not stifling but liberating. Not having to re-invent the wheel each week, we gain the freedom to concentrate on worshipping God.

Anglo-Catholic worship is *sacramental*, in two senses of the word. First, it gives a central place to the Sacraments—especially the Holy Eucharist—as the appointed means by which we receive God's grace and strength. Secondly, because we are not pure intellects or disembodied spirits, Anglo-Catholic worship engages us in the fullness of our humanity, body and soul, by means of visible signs and symbols that appeal to our sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. For this reason, our worship is deeply and richly sensual, making full use of music, incense, candles, vestments, sacred images, and ceremonial pageantry as the vehicles through which our hearts and minds are lifted to the unseen God.

Finally, Anglo-Catholic worship is *corporate* in that it is the activity of a gathered assembly. God did not create us to be isolated individuals. As human beings, we find the fullness of our identity in relationship with others. For this reason, the liturgy fulfills our nature as social beings by bringing us together as members of a community. Worshiping together, we grow in our ability to forgive one another as God has forgiven us, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS Concerning Anglo-Catholic Worship

1. Why all the ritual and ceremonial?

It is a common misconception that rituals are by definition empty and meaningless, that they involve “just going through the motions.” Anthropologists and sociologists have discovered that ritual is intrinsic to being human. We rely on countless rituals to bring meaning and order into every aspect of our lives. The classic example of an everyday ritual is a handshake, which not only signifies but also actualizes the friendship that it symbolizes. (If you doubt this, then consider the impact of refusing to shake someone's hand!) Anglo-Catholic worship engages us in the fullness of who we are as human beings; and that means that it engages us by means of ritual: processions, bows, signs of the cross, and so forth. Yes, rituals can become empty when we perform them absent mindedly without paying attention to their meaning. The solution, however, is not to jettison the rituals but rather to revivify them by performing them thoughtfully and prayerfully.

2. Why all those fancy robes?

In the Anglican tradition, they are called not “robes” but “vestments.” At one level, their purpose is similar to that of ceremonial dress uniforms in the military: they signify a rank and a function. When the Sacred Ministers and servers put on the sacred vestments, they are stepping into a defined liturgical role. So far as possible, the vestments serve to obscure the idiosyncratic features of individual personalities that call attention to themselves and distract the congregation from prayer and worship. For example, the chasuble worn by the priest helps the congregation to see not Fr. So-and-So with all his annoying quirks and foibles but rather *the celebrant of the Mass*. At another level, the wearing of sacred vestments serves as a reminder that the ministers of the Mass are engaged in no ordinary mundane activity but rather are treading on holy ground and handling holy things.

3. Why do you pray out of a book?

It is sometimes alleged that prayers read from a book are less sincere than spontaneous prayers “from the heart.” But this criticism misses the point. As the title of *The Book of Common Prayer* implies, these prayers are “common” prayer—that is, the corporate prayer of the congregation and of the entire

universal Church. The Anglican spiritual tradition certainly encourages us to pray in our own words, as we are led by the Holy Spirit, *in our private devotions*. But what we find in the Prayer Book are not private prayers, but rather corporate liturgical prayers. They distill centuries of spiritual wisdom, embodying the thoughts, sentiments, and aspirations of the generations of faithful Christians who have gone before us. Reading these prayers and making them our own can only enrich our personal prayer lives.

4. Why do you use such old-fashioned language?

While worship in the everyday vernacular is perfectly valid, many liturgical traditions set apart a special language for worship – from the Latin of the Roman Mass to the Church Slavonic of Russian Orthodoxy. Here at S. Stephen's, our liturgical language is Tudor English, dating back to the 16th century. For the most part, it is intelligible if a bit strange sounding to the ears of modern English speakers. But even with its archaisms and occasionally difficult constructions, it is oddly haunting and beautiful. In worship, we approach God with holy things set apart for holy purposes – such as sacred vestments and sacred vessels. Likewise, in corporate liturgical prayer, we employ a special language set apart for holy purposes.

5. Why does the priest pray with his back to the people?

The priest is not so much turning his back on the people as turning to face in the same direction as the people, in solidarity with them. Christian churches are traditionally built facing east, towards the rising sun, which symbolizes Christ rising from the dead and returning at the end of time to judge the world. So, when the priest prays on behalf of the congregation, he faces east to emphasize that he is addressing God. Then, at certain points in the liturgy, he turns to address the congregation on behalf of God. The currently pervasive practice of the priest facing the congregation from behind a freestanding altar tends to close the assembly in on itself, making the liturgy resemble more a celebration of community than an offering of worship. When the priest prays facing the people, he is apt to convey the false impression that he is praying *to* the people, thus implying that the congregation itself is divine. By contrast, the eastward position rightly emphasizes God's transcendence and holiness. By adhering to the eastward position, we hope to contribute to its eventual recovery in the wider Church – a process that shows some signs of being under way in the movement known as "the Reform of the Reform."

6. Why do you use incense?

In the ancient world, incense was the equivalent of modern air freshener. When an important guest was coming to visit, one would burn incense in one's home to purify the air and eliminate foul odors. Since we believe that Jesus Christ comes into our midst during the celebration of the Eucharist, we cense the altar, the ministers, and congregation as a symbolic purification in anticipation of his arrival. Also, the rising smoke of the incense is sometimes said to symbolize prayer rising to heaven.

At the most basic level, however, it just smells nice. Anglo-Catholic worship engages us through all our senses, so that we come to associate the joy of worship and the comfort of prayer with the pleasant aroma of an incense-filled church.

7. Why does only the choir sing parts of the service that the entire congregation sings in many other Episcopal parishes?

An important part of the mission of our parish is to preserve and strengthen the Church's tradition of choral Mass settings. From the late Middle Ages through the modern period, composers have set the texts of the Ordinary of the Mass – the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei* – to music sung by a choir. Instead of singing along, the congregation is invited to meditate on the texts as the choir sings them. This venerable tradition of choral Mass settings immeasurably enriches our liturgy. Moreover, this music was written for worship; when sung in a concert hall it loses much of the vitality and power it derives from being sung in its proper context in fulfillment of its proper purpose.

8. Why does the choir sing so much in Latin?

Occasionally, we use Mass settings composed specifically for the English Prayer Book service of Holy Communion. But more often our choral Mass settings were written for the Latin Mass in the Roman Catholic Church. These texts are best sung in the language for which the music was originally composed. Moreover, hearing these texts sung in Latin gives us a sense of our continuity and fellowship with the ancient and universal Church. For those who attend regularly, the Latin texts of the Ordinary of the Mass quickly become familiar and intelligible even to those who've never studied Latin.

9. Why does the service take so long?

Our 10:00 am Sunday Solemn High Mass typically lasts an hour and a half. Services in some other churches – such as Eastern Orthodox or Pentecostal Churches – often last much longer. Still, our liturgy is longer than in many other churches, whose services do not exceed one hour. On balance, the length of our service is probably typical for Anglo-Catholic parishes using Rite I and a choral Mass setting. Suffice it to say that any worthwhile activity is worth the time it takes. Many people have no problem sitting in a cinema for two hours to watch a film, or in a stadium for three hours to watch a game of baseball or football. Many worshipers report that during the liturgy they lose all track of time, so caught up are they in the praises of God. That's the ideal we're aiming for.

Whenever on his travels Wulfstan came to a chapel,
neither haste nor urgent need could move him to pass by
without a visit. He would go in and offer to God and the
patron saint of the church the incense of his prayers with
those tears that someone reported were always ready to
flow.

Life of Wulfstan



S. Stephen's Church in Providence
114 George Street
Providence, RI 02906
Address Correction Requested



Advent Quiet Day

Saturday, December 9

Speaker: **Mother Miriam**

Of the Community of Saint Mary, Greenwich, New York

Advent Lessons & Carols

Sunday December 3 at 5:30 p.m.

The Schola Cantorum

under the direction of

James Busby

Organist and Choirmaster

will offer the music of:

Byrd, Distler, Esquivel, O. Gibbons
Ledger, Palestrina, Parsons, & Weelkes

A reception follows in the Great Hall