

# THE ANGLE

February  
2020

## The Way of Love - Blessing

*At the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in Austin in the summer of 2018, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry offered his vision of a Jesus-centered life, which he “packaged” as the Way of Love. It has seven stages – Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, and Rest. In past months I offered some thoughts about Turn, Learn, Pray, and Worship. This month, we continue with Bless.*

As I write this, I am sitting in one of the temples of coffee culture – drinking tea. Like a vegetarian in a steakhouse, I am aware that there



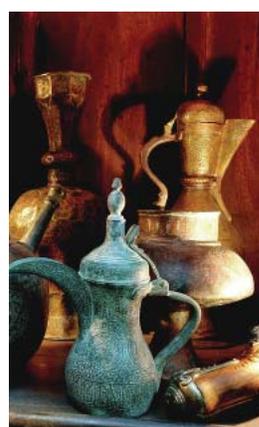
is a ceremony going on around me, even if I am only a spectator. It has all the necessary elements: ritual gestures, mysterious equipment (if an espresso were made and no one was around, would the

machine still make that much noise?), obscure language (does anyone know what “macchiato” means?), outward signs of inward changes.

All of this to deliver water, some alkaloids, and maybe a little cream and sugar. The same could be had from a fifty-gallon drum at a convenience store or the battle-scarred Mr Coffees in thousands of workplace break rooms, and at a fraction of the price. So what is it that draws so many people to the cold brews and flat whites that cost as much as our parents paid for lunch?



The overall answer is love – no surprise there, given the theme of this series of articles. The people behind the counter and their customers love coffee, are passionate about it. I have, on occasion, made the mistake of asking a barista to explain some version of coffee that I didn’t recognize. The result has been a graduate seminar, sometimes with other customers joining in. (A fun fact: the Italian coffee giant Illy offers a Master of Coffee Economics and Science degree in collaboration with two universities.)



Our shared loves connect us. Much of the power of the Way of Love lies in our discovery that we are not alone in wanting to be guided by it. Like the followers of the higher coffee culture, the devotees of the Way of Love are all around us – sometimes diffident, sometimes rampant, always ready to share the joy that it awakens in them and in the world.

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But the stage of the Way that we have reached this month is Blessing. So that must somehow go into the mix too. In general, it is invisible. Its presence may be apparent – at least to some – but it usually can't be touched, much less held onto and analyzed.

It can feel like an ending, a gold watch given for faithful service. But more often I think it is a beginning, a dose of confidence that

pushes us toward something new. To hear from God, "I love you," is always welcome, but to hear, "I love you so much that I have a job for you to do," is truly a blessing.



If this is in fact the case, it seems odd that Bless comes in only as the fifth stage on the Way. Surely it should start everything off. Back in the world of coffee, it would be the first cup that gets so many people out the door in the morning. But maybe its purpose is not quite so crudely mechanical. And maybe it is only discernable



after we make our way through the other stages – turning, learning, praying, and worshipping – gaining awareness of the presence of God just on the periphery of our vision.

This seems to me to be a very Anglican way of imagining what blessing is about – not a sudden event, but a gradual awakening. God is always before us, behind us, above us, beside us. It stands to reason that God's blessing has always been there too, even if at first we failed to recognize it. We enter God's Way of Love with the story already in progress. And in God's time and with the help of grace, we may hope to learn for ourselves that it was God's love story for us long before we made any



attempt to return the sentiment.

So we start at the middle. Having traveled some distance with God, we discover that the love we receive and seek to share did not begin with us, indeed had no beginning at all. It always was. We were blessed before we knew it, but now that we perceive it, we have the inspiration to travel a bit further along the Way.

Blessings

Howie+

### **Five-Minute Devotional**

*From the Book of Common Prayer:*

O God of peace, you have taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When anyone asks how I am, as often as not my reaction is some variation on, "busy, as usual." I don't think I am alone in feeling the urge to redeem the time, produce more, justify the space and resources I consume, justify the life I have been given. Rest and quietness? Maybe when one more thing is done, and one more, and one more.

Yet rest and quiet (often with prayer) come to us with the highest of recommendations. Jesus himself is recorded as following these practices (Matthew 14:13, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16) and as urging his followers to do likewise (Mark 6:31). Plainly, this time serves some spiritual good.

Perhaps that good is simply the gathering of strength for the next round, but might it also have something to do with seeing clearly what that next round should be? If stillness can quiet our cluttered souls long enough, perhaps the awareness that God is God and we are not may show our busy-ness in a new light.

## February Saints

1	Brigid	<i>Patron of:</i> Dairy workers, scholars
	Severus of Avranches	Milliners and hatters
2	Catherine del Ricci	Tobacconists
3	Blaise	Veterinarians, throat ailments, pigs, makers of socks
5	Agatha	Bakers, bell makers
6	Dorothy of Caesarea Amand of Maastricht	Brewers, midwives Vinegar makers, Protection against cattle diseases
9	Apollonia of Alexandria	Dentists, dental technicians, Protection against dental disease
10	Scholastica	Convulsive children, Protection from storms

*According to a ninth century tradition, Scholastica was the twin sister of Saint Benedict of Nursia. Benedictine tradition holds that Scholastica established a hermitage about five miles from Monte Cassino and that this was the first "Benedictine" convent. On one occasion, Benedict and Scholastica had supper and continued their conversation into the evening. When Benedict indicated it was time for him to leave, perhaps sensing the time of her death was drawing near, Scholastica asked him to stay with her for the evening so they could continue their discussions. Not wishing to break his own Rule, Benedict refused, insisting that he needed to return to his cell. At that point, Scholastica closed her hands in prayer, and after a moment, a wild storm started outside of the guest house in which they were housed. Benedict asked, "What have you done?", to which she replied, "I asked you and you would not listen; so I asked my God and he did listen. So now go off, if you can, leave me and return to your monastery." Benedict was unable to return to his monastery, and they spent the night in discussion.*

Hyacinth	Protection from drowning
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12	Julian the Hospitaller	Clowns, fiddle players, To obtain lodging while traveling
14	Valentine	Beekeepers, greeting card manufacturers, Protection against fainting and plague

*Valentine was a clergyman – either a priest or a bishop – in the Roman Empire who ministered to persecuted Christians. It is said that he defied the order of the emperor Claudius and secretly performed Christian weddings for couples, allowing the husbands involved to escape conscription. Some accounts mention that in order to remind these men of their vows and God's love, Saint Valentine cut hearts from parchment, giving them to these soldiers and other persecuted Christians, a possible origin of the widespread use of hearts on St. Valentine's Day.*

16	Juliana of Nicomedia	Childbirth
19	Conrad of Piacenza	Protection against hernias
21	Peter Damian	Parkour practitioners
23	Polycarp	Protection against earache and dysentery
	Milburga	Birds
25	Walburga	Protection against coughs and dog bites
27	Baldomerus	Locksmiths

## Why Do We Do That? - Ashes

Ashes appear often in the Old and New Testaments as symbols of sorrow and mourning. In ancient times, they were a visible way of identifying one who had recently lost a loved one – and so, presumably, an encouragement to compassion.

In Christianity, they are used by many Western Christian denominations as a reminder of our mortality and need to turn back to God – major themes in Lent. The Eastern Orthodox churches generally do not use ashes, nor do

some Protestant churches that feel they violate Jesus' instruction to not practice our piety publicly. The ashes we use are blessed, but are not considered to be a sacrament, so they can be washed off at any time with no ceremony and no guilt.

