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Joshua fought the battle of Jericho. If you remember this Bible Story, the Israelites had finally made their way into Canaan, and they come to the stronghold of Jericho. Jericho was a fortified city, with walls so thick that they raced chariots upon the tops of the castle's wall. Anyone remotely familiar with ancient military strategy would expect Joshua and the Israelites to lay siege to Jericho, to cut off their supply chains, and to spend weeks trying to go over, under and through the famous walls of Jericho. But God had other ideas, He does not instruct them to build battering rams, towers, and catapults. Instead, God promises the Israelites that if they obey Him, if they process around Jericho with the Ark of the Covenant for seven days, and on the seventh day praise Him making a loud noise with trumpets, cymbals, breaking jars, and lifting up their voices, then He will deliver the city into their hands. Joshua and the Israelites did as they were commanded and the stronghold of Jericho, and its great walls 'came tumbling down.'

Hundreds of years after Joshua and Jericho, in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, we find that after seventy years of Babylonian captivity, God called Ezra and Nehemiah to return to Israel and rebuild the walls and gates of Jerusalem and the Temple. It was no easy process. This great undertaking took years to complete, and after many interruptions they completed their mission, and they dedicated the walls of Jerusalem by processing along the tops of the walls and praising God and offering sacrifices to Him. Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was symbolic of what was taking place spiritually within the Jewish People who were returning to the true worship of God. The vessels of gold and silver which had been taken away as trophies by pagan conquerors were returned to their rightful place. The priests and servers of the Temple were reconsecrated to God's service, and God's commandments on bringing in tithes from the harvests were renewed with great enthusiasm. As the religious center of Jerusalem was reborn new life flowed into the homes and farms all around Jerusalem.

These lessons from the Scriptures serve to remind us that prayer is not just concerned with the spiritual, but with the material as well, and these two are not divorced from each other. They remind us that we as Christians are called to pray, to use the material for God's service, and to do spiritual battle against the Jericho's and strongholds in our lives. This lesson is especially meaningful for Rogation Sunday and the ancient tradition of following in Joshua, Ezra and Nehemiah's footsteps and processing around the boundaries of the parish.

The name "Rogation Sunday" comes from the Medieval Church. During the Rogations, the three days before Ascension Day, the faithful devoted themselves to prayer. This took the form of fasting, prayer and, processions of the congregation throughout the boundaries of the parish. A parish in those days included an entire village or town, sometimes an entire county. Perhaps we should be relieved

today that things have changed, and we do not have to process around the entirety of Cypress. However, regardless of the size of the parish, the church processed through the villages and fields, they sang hymns, psalms, and they prayed. They prayed for God's blessing and protection over the parish, that their crops would be fruitful, that no plague or sickness would come their way, and they prayed for protection from all dangers seen and unseen. They had the opportunity to pray for these things every day at Mass, but the procession brought their prayer to a higher level, they spiritually and physically rededicated themselves, their parish, and their town and everything in it to God. The Rogation Day processions of olden times demanded a sacrifice, which took the faithful on an hours-long walk, over all kinds of terrain, through dust and mud, in all kinds of weather, in the rain, in the cold, and in scorching heat. They sacrificed their one day of rest for a strenuous procession around the boundary of the entire parish. The procession put the prayers of the parish in motion.

Rogation Sunday reminds us that God is concerned with the spiritual and the material. He is concerned most for our souls, but He also cares for the health of our material bodies. We are reminded that we cannot truly live without God's blessing on our lives. God is indeed concerned with our families, our homes, our crops, our lands, our city and country, and in order to procure His blessing over them we must dedicate them to God and to God's service. God desires to transform our lives and to transform our prayer. Jesus teaches us in this morning's Gospel to transform our prayers through the power of His Name, and the power of His Word. We hear Jesus say, *whatsoever ye shall ask in my Name the father will give you*, we know well that this passage of the Gospel does not mean that if we end our prayers "in Jesus Name," God will give us whatever we want, and how we want it. We know from the Scriptures, even those that were written before the Incarnation, that prayer does not work this way. Joshua probably prayed to God for a revelation for Jericho's weakest point, Joshua probably did not expect to spend an entire week doing something as harmless as processing around the walls of Jericho. Neither did the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah have an easy time of rebuilding the walls and the Temple of Jerusalem stone by stone. God did not make the task simple and instantaneous for them. Neither does God make every situation simple and instantaneous for us. We often want an easy remedy and instant gratification, but this is not how God works. God wants us to learn that the greatest blessings often come from times of inward sacrifice that are made evident externally.

We must *be doers of the word and not hearers only*. Sacrifice and prayer are fundamentally related, not because answered prayer is dependent upon our works, but because fasting and sacrifice reminds us that God calls every Christian to prayer. Through fasting and prayer, we remind ourselves of our great need for God and of our dependency on Him. The hunger that we feel when we fast, the sacrifice of our

time, energy, or comforts reminds us that we must hunger for God and find our comfort in Him. We must be prepared to act on our prayers, and we should be as devoted to prayer as we are to our work. Let us not forget too that sometimes we must put our prayer in motion, it is a good thing to pray for our neighbors, but we must also go to our neighbors and pray with them.

This week let us process with the Risen Christ through our homes, our families, our city, and our country and pray for God's blessing and protection. The Mass tells us that this is how the holy Apostle, Paul, has taught us to pray; it is after all *our bounden duty and service*. We must pray according to God's Will, to will what God wills, and be willing to act on our prayer. Regardless of our vocation we are called to be people of prayer, to join the long procession of the faithful through the ages in their hymns, psalms, and prayers following the Risen Christ through this world to the kingdom of heaven. Amen.