

+

Today is Rogation Sunday, in which historically the Church would process throughout the towns and villages and proclaim the Resurrected Christ over the world. Rogation Sunday and Monday through Wednesday, called Rogation-tide, are days of voluntary fasting and prayer to prepare us for the great feast of Ascension Day on Thursday and to ready ourselves for the Feast of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the world. Traditionally, the fasting and prayer of Rogation-tide had a two-fold purpose, in preparation for Ascension Day, and for God's protection over the coming harvest. We may not think too often of praying for God's protection over the crops to be harvested. In our modern age it is easy to forget how dependent we are on good crops and good harvests, and how dependent we are on God for our daily physical needs. Rogation Sunday teaches us that no matter what happens in the news, the grocery store, or the stock market, we are called to fast and pray, and with the recent flooding nearby this lesson may hit closer to home this year than previously. Our lives are first and foremost to be marked as lives of prayer and praise to God, and to live that out in our lives, to put our prayers and praise into action through service to God and our fellow man.

And so, we take the time at the end of this Easter Season for a lesson in prayer. We pray specifically for God's blessing of the first fruits, remembering, as St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.* We pray for God's blessing for the coming harvest of the crops, all the while remembering that we are to be that spiritual harvest. And because we are that spiritual harvest, Jesus tells us that *whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you.* He tells us of the victory He has won through the cross, death, and resurrection. His victory is not just a victory over sin, but it is a victory over the world. The chains of sin and death, which reached from the spiritual into the physical world have been broken. Jesus has power not to just save souls and make sure we go to heaven, but He has power to bring heaven down to earth. Because of Jesus' physical death and resurrection, the battle is taken from the soul into the street and into our homes. As St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, *for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* This is why we can process out of the church doors and into the roads of our neighborhoods and claim it all for the Kingdom of Heaven. Rogation Sunday

reminds us that we are not called to live in cloistered cells but that we are called to be *in the world but not of the world* and physically spread the Kingdom of God.

We long to see *God's Kingdom come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven*, but we must establish the kingdom of God in our own hearts, in our own homes, in our own families first. St. James exhorts us, *be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only...if any man seems to be religious, and does not bridle his tongue, then his religion is vain*. Jesus had also pointed out to the Pharisees that *it is not what is on the outside that defiles a man, but what it is on the inside that defiles a man*. This is a warning to us all, if we count ourselves as Christians but what comes out of our mouths and hearts is filthy then the Kingdom of God is not within us. We cannot proclaim the Kingdom of God over our homes, our families, and our country, if the Kingdom of God is not already established in our hearts and souls.

Jesus says, *hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name, ask and ye shall receive that your joy may be full*. We wonder why Jesus says this, and yet we have prayed faithfully for years and to no avail. But we must realize that to pray and then trust in our own actions and merits is not to pray in Jesus' Name. We have heard the old adage, *God helps those who helps themselves*, and to an extent this is true, in so far that we must be hearers and doers of God's word. But God never intended us to rely on ourselves, our brilliance or our prudence for every problem that comes our way. God wants us to rely on Him, to acknowledge that only He can answer our prayers, solve our problems, and provide for all our needs, and in His perfect timing. It is when we try to answer our own prayers, solve our own problems, and provide for our own needs by ourselves and on our own timetable that we fall into danger. The Imitation of Christ reminds us, *a false liberty of will and excessive trust in ourselves is quite contrary to heavenly [grace]*. *Our Lord does well in sending such comforts, but we do not do well when we do not thank Him for them. The greatest reason why the gifts of grace do not easily come to us, why our prayers go so long unanswered, is because we are ungrateful and do not give thanks to God from whom all good things come. Grace, [answered prayer] is always given to those ready to give thanks for it.*

St. Padre Pio is famous for saying, *pray, trust, and do not worry*, and we must also add *give thanks to God*. Yet it seems today that the trusting and not worrying is harder than the praying. And how often does a lack of trust and constant worry, lead to the souring of our hearts? But what does Jesus say? We hear this very morning, *I have spoken all of these things unto you, that in me you may have peace...be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*. Jesus already has the power

to overcome our worries and anxieties, he is working on transforming the world, now if only we would let Him transform our hearts. We have another opportunity for this transformation this morning, in coming again to His altar, to receive His Body and Blood, *to feed on Him in our hearts by faith, with thanksgiving*. We pray that He will also renew in us the Spirit of Prayer,

*O Almighty God, who pourest out on all who desire it, the spirit of grace and of supplication; Deliver us, when we draw nigh to thee, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections, we may worship thee in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*