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Today we celebrate Rogation Sunday and have processed outside as we did on Palm Sunday. It is easy to fall into thinking that Rogation processions, Palm Sunday processions, and even the processions that we did on Sundays during Lent are just old romantic Medieval holdovers which have lost all of their meaning and significance. We may wonder what this all means for us personally, aside from continuing and repeating ancient traditions.

The name "Rogation Sunday" does indeed come 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 and prayer and processions of the congregation throughout the boundaries of the parish. Remember that a parish in the old days included an entire village or town, sometimes an entire county. Perhaps we should be relieved today though 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. The Rogation Day processions of the old days 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. The faithful sacrificed their one day of rest for a strenuous procession around the boundary of the entire parish. The procession was a type of fast, it was a sacrifice, and it put the prayers of the parish in motion.

We find this form of prayer foreshadowed in the Scriptures. In the story of Joshua and the battle of Jericho, God commands the Israelites to process around the great walls of Jericho for seven days. He does not instruct them to build battering rams, towers, and catapults to take the fortified city. Instead, God promises the Israelites that if they obey Him, if they process around Jericho with the Ark of the Covenant, and on the seventh rogation of the seventh day praise Him, then He will deliver the city into their hands. Joshua did as He was commanded and the stronghold of Jericho 'came tumbling down.' From this story we remember that we as Christians are called to pray, to do spiritual battle, against the Jerichos, the strongholds in our lives. Hundreds of years after Joshua and Jericho, in the books of Ezra and Nehemia, we find that after seventy years of Babylonian captivity, some of the Israelites returned and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and the

Temple. Finally, after the walls were completed, they dedicated the walls not through extravagant ritual but by processing along the tops of the walls and praising God and offering sacrifices to Him. 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. Through material means men make their inward and spiritual offerings in an external and visible way.

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 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 transforms 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. 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.

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 remind us that we must hunger for God and find our comfort in Him. St. James calls us this morning to *be doers of the word and not hearers only*. 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 in their hymns, psalms, and prayers following the Risen Christ through this world to heaven. Amen.