

C. D'Angelo+

22 May 2022

Rogation Sunday

9:30am/11:00am

St Thomas's Huron Street

Today, we gather to commemorate Rogation Sunday, a time set apart each year in the Church calendar to mark the beginning of the growing season when seeds are sown in the ground. The word Rogation comes from the root *rogare* which means 'to ask' or 'to pray'. Traditionally, rogation processions involved the practice known as 'beating the bounds', which meant processing around the perimeter of the geographical area of each parish, at which the parish church stood at the physical and spiritual centre. As seeds were being sown in the ground, the people would ask for God's protection over the entire community from famine, disease and other forms of affliction and pray for God's blessings on all who lived in that community, recognizing that the well-being of any was dependent upon the well-being of all.

In our densely populated, urban context, where few or any of us are directly involved in food production, we might only come into contact with food at the very last stages of its production when it is sold at the supermarket. And so, the observance of Rogation Sunday is a crucial reminder of what we are tempted to forget living where we do: that the air that we breathe, the water that we drink and the food that we eat connects us to the natural world and to other people in our immediate community (and often far beyond). The observance of Rogation reminds us that our own physical well-being is inextricably bound

up with those to whom we are connected because we are living creatures who breathe, drink, eat and depend upon the labour of others to live. Even we who might have little to do with food production must recognize that our long-term well-being depends upon the integrity and health of soil, waterways, climate patterns and systems of food production. Do we know where our food comes from or how it is produced? Are we aware of the true impact of our present lifestyles on the planet, our neighbour and on other creatures? How might we more fully acknowledge and honour these vital connections? These are some of the extremely important questions that Rogation Sunday invites us to ask each year.

Yet, the timing of Rogation Sunday, the coupling of this commemoration with that of the Feast of the Ascension coming up on Thursday evening, also raises questions that are worth probing.

After all, at first glance, the theme of each one couldn't seem more at odds: the one focused so strongly on what is earthly; and the other on what is heavenly.

Rogation Sunday marks the beginning of the growing season when seeds are first sown in the ground. This commemoration and the days that follow remind us that our physical lives are sustained by the food that we eat which, in turn connects us to the life of the earth which brings forth the food that we need to live each year, which in turn connects us ultimately to God our Creator.

On the other hand, the Ascension seems to be about something completely different than Rogation Sunday, at the opposite end of the spectrum: its focus strictly heavenly and not earthly. The Feast of the Ascension, after all, is the Church's celebration of the bodily ascent of the risen Christ into heaven forty days after Easter.

But the Ascension is misunderstood by us if we think of it along the lines of when Christ, as a lone individual, vacates our world, even abandons it, floating away from us, leaving us here untethered from him in the loss, limitation, need, suffering and death which mark our present life in the world tied to the cycles of nature.

And so, the coupling of these two commemorations, Rogation and Ascension, can, in fact, be very helpful in pointing us to the comprehensiveness of the Christian vision as rooted in the reality of Christ's Incarnation.

After all, we believe that, through his being born as a tiny, vulnerable baby, and throughout his earthly life culminating in his crucifixion, Jesus unites us to God. In Jesus, God fully enters into our human lot: entering into the vulnerability, sorrow, suffering and death which are part of our condition in this life; Jesus does so, so that we might come to share in the life of God which is everlasting life where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain.

By his birth, life, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension and by the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus unites the earthly to the heavenly, the bodily to the spiritual, the human to the divine, not to separate from us, not to float off into the heavens and disappear into the sky without us; but especially in our moments of greatest weakness and vulnerability, to unite us to that divine love without beginning or end in whose embrace all things are made new.

By taking up the language of 'the Word' in whom all things came into being combined with the emphasis on the love of God for the world, the Gospel of John portrays

what we in our modern age most often deny: that the world and everything that is in it as coming from the love of God and returning to that same eternal love. In summary, taken together, Rogation Sunday and Ascension Day are about how, in Christ through his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, all of our need, all of our human weakness is drawn into the heart of God, the only place of ultimate rest where true and lasting joys are to be found, where our thirst is finally quenched and our hunger fully satisfied, where our hearts need not be troubled nor afraid.

As Christians, therefore, we can live by faith and hope that the earthly is not opposed to the heavenly, nor is the bodily opposed to the spiritual, nor is the divine set over against the human, nor is death the destruction of those who we love and cherish so dearly but instead the gateway to eternal life: because all things have been brought into unity in Christ. For the gift of our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life, and above all for the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, let us, therefore, offers thanks and praise to God with both now and always. *Amen.*