



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday May 25, 2014 - Rogation Sunday

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.**

The passage selected for the sermon is taken from the Gospel:

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me, ye might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

St John 16:33

As I prepared for this sermon on Rogation Day, the prayer for good harvest, I was struck by this passage from the 55th chapter of Isaiah, which was read as the Old Testament lesson for the eve of Rogation Sunday. “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heaven is higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down and the snow from Heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, making it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater. So shall my word be that goeth not out of my mouth, it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace.” The rains of our lives, the snow, even the black ice, come into our lives to

transform us and to accomplish the will of God in us, that as we are led from this life, as we blossom into the life of the Resurrection, we will cross the threshold of death into life with joy and peace.

This weekend, because the late celebration of Easter, we have the remembrance of both Memorial Day and Rogation Sunday. It is, as we say before the Sanctus, “meet and right, so to do.” Memorial Day is an American holiday, established after the Civil War, to honor the men who gave their life in defense of their country in that conflict, and it was meant to honor men who fought on either side. On the first Memorial Day, or Decoration Day, as it was originally called, President Garfield led 5,000 celebrants as he decorated the graves of 20,000 Union and Confederate soldiers buried at Arlington National Cemetery, the family farm of Robert E. Lee.

Rogation Day is an ancient tradition of the unified Church. Rogation comes from the Latin verb, rogare, which means “to ask”. What we ask for on Rogation Day is the blessing of our lands, especially our farms and gardens, requesting a bountiful harvest. Of course ancient pagans asked their gods for the blessing of a bountiful harvest, and the Church recognized that the sentiment was proper, though the petitions were mis-directed, so we appropriated the concept and re-directed the petitions to the One True God. In Medieval

times, the Memorial of Rogation Day started with a procession from the Church, with all the people praying the Litany of the Saints, and the boundary of the parish would be walked while saying those prayers, ending back at the Church where Mass would be celebrated.

This symbolism of planting and harvest is appropriate for both the national heroes and our religious heroes. Truly, the bodies of the men and women who have fallen in the defense of our country and the countries we have chosen to defend from tyranny, are the planting that has emerged into the harvest that is truly both our freedom, and freedom with human dignity in all the world. This symbolism of the blood of heroes reaped as the harvest of freedom is symbolized by the wearing of poppies in remembrance of the fallen, which emerged during WWI, inspired by the poppies on the graves at Flanders Field in Belgium. The image of the poppies growing between the whitewashed crosses in the cemetery inspired a Canadian Physician, John McRae, to write the famous poem, and in turn he inspired Moina Michael to write in 1915,

*“We cherish too, the Poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led,
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies.”*

Ms. Michael began to wear and sell the red poppies in remembrance of our heroes and used the money for the families of those fallen heroes who were in need. A Madame Guerin brought the tradition to France to support the widows of their warriors, and the tradition spread throughout Europe. The VFW took over the remembrance in the US in 1922, and continues it to this day. Indeed the blood of heroes never dies, and our harvest of freedom springs from their sacrifice.

We should recognize the spiritual precedent that underlies our national and patriotic remembrance. It was the blood of Jesus, courageously shed in the ultimate war against the archetypal evils of sin, death and the devil, that is the basis for our Spiritual freedom. The sacrifice of Jesus, and of the martyrs that have given their own lives to follow Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, are the fertile field from which the flower of our salvation grows.

As patriots, we know that Ms. Michael’s verse, “that the blood of heroes never dies”, means that their sacrifice lives on in the freedoms our generation continues to enjoy. As Christians, we can give thanks that these heroes actually and truly live, and live life perfectly, waiting and praying that we will join them in the light and love of life in Jesus Christ. They don’t live on merely as the spirit of a nation, or the privileges a nation may enjoy. Their life is not symbolic or allegorical. They live in heaven, and they will have Resurrected and perfected bodies, and as the marks of Jesus’s passion and death became the glory that identified and united Him to the Apostles, the mortal wounds suffered by these heroes will be transformed into their glory as we are reunited with them for eternity.

We give thanks that by the sacrifice of our heroes, we live free from the tyranny of evil men, and more importantly, we give thanks that by Jesus Christ, we will celebrate their sacrifices, united with them in the Resurrection, and enjoying a life that is free from the tyrannies of sadness, sickness, loneliness and death, life everlasting secured for us with them by the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen