



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday May 21, 2017 - Rogation Sunday

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

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

“Verily, verily I say to you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name; ask and ye shall receive, that your joy shall be full.”

Rogation Day, which we celebrate today, 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 misdirected, 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 boundaries of the parish would be walked while saying those prayers, ending back at the Church where Mass would be celebrated.

In the context of this tradition, it is easy to see how the Gospel is appropriate. Jesus gives us both this promise and instruction. “Ask and ye shall receive.” A comforting statement. It is as comforting a statement as God could possibly make to His Creation. It is a shame that we don’t believe it. Of course, we don’t mean to say that Jesus is lying to us, but we really don’t believe it. We look on this statement as if it were symbolic, or maybe as one of those trick statements with disclaimers in small print, or perhaps as if there was some obscure meaning

attached to the words in Aramaic or Greek that are lost to us in the English translation.

Why should we believe it? We know that it isn’t true from our own experience, or at least we know it isn’t quite that simple. From the time when we were little, when we prayed for a toy, or for someone to notice us, or for our parents to stop fighting, we have asked in Jesus’ name and have been disappointed. As adults, we ask for financial relief, we pray for physical healing, we pray for mending of broken relationships, we pray for those we love in distress and sickness, we pray for others in danger of death, and our prayers have seemingly been unanswered. How can we believe that if we ask in Jesus’ name, we will receive?

Even Scripture is full of failed requests. St. Phillip asks Jesus to show him the Father, and Jesus tells him to look at Him and he will see the Father. For Phillip, asking Jesus didn’t work. St. Peter asks that Jesus be spared when He revealed the ordeal He was about to face. Jesus answered Him, “Get thee behind me Satan.” The mother of James and John asks that her sons be set at the right and left hand of God, and Jesus says, “that is not mine to give”. St. Paul prays that the spur in his side be removed, and the Lord says no. Even Jesus asks that the Cup that has been prepared for Him might pass Him by if it would be the Father’s will, and even Jesus is denied.

We have every reason by experience and human understanding to believe that the Promise, “Ask and ye shall receive,” is not true. Every reason but one, that Jesus made the promise and in Him there is no darkness or deception. He speaks only the truth, so the promise must be true.

So how can we reconcile our experience with this promise. Sometimes when we pray in desperation or in pride, we fail to pray in faith, to believe in the full power of the name we invoke, Jesus Christ. The Apostles claim to believe Jesus in this very Gospel, and He points out the weakness of their faith, “Do you now believe? Behold the hour cometh, and is now come that you will be scattered, every man to His own, and shall leave me alone.”

The truth that underlies this promise is simply that Our Father will not contradict Himself. He made the Promise to be our God, and to make us His people, and he will not negate that promise by giving us those things which are contrary to His will for us and or the world. He keeps the higher promise, the Godly promise. He gives us grace to understand what we should ask of Him that which will show forth His glory and complete His will for us. He knows we are worried about the immediate and earthly tribulations that we face. We pray about our need, temptation, sickness and death, but He commands us not to be anxious about these things, but to put heavenly things first, and He will provide for every other need as He sees fit.

St. Philip prayed to see the Father, and Jesus did show Him the Father in His Person and in His works, but Philip’s eyes could not understand how his prayer had been answered until he received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The mother of James and John begged for an earthly place of honor, on the right and left hand of Jesus, but He had already reserved another greater place for them, on an Eternal and heavenly throne to judge the tribes of Israel. He wouldn’t give them less than He had reserved for them, even to fulfill a Mother’s finite earthly vision. St. Peter asked that His friend be spared suffering and death. But the Father had determined to use that suffering and death for greater purpose, to save Peter and every one of us. He wouldn’t relieve Peter of His sadness for his friend, because it would have robbed him of the joy and peace that would come when the Father’s will for Jesus was complete. St. Paul prayed continually for his pain in his side to be relieved, but the Lord explained that the pain was a gift, a shield of grace to defend Paul from his pride, and to preserve him for the heavenly destiny reserved for him. The Lord will not relieve us of the pain and shame that keeps us from sin or drives us to beg forgiveness for the sins we have committed. We will bear the burdens necessary to keep us firmly in the way of our sanctification.

Even Jesus, when He prayed in the Garden, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me, nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done,” (St. Luke 22:42) prayed first for himself, but not at the expense of God’s will. He died so that we would live, and His Resurrection proved we should not fear death. The Father’s will was that His Son’s sacrifice would be both our Salvation and the example by which we would lead our lives.

The Father is a good Father. He doesn’t give in to our every whim, self indulgence or desire, and then expect that we won’t grow up to be selfish. By the example that He gives us in His Son, He shows us that we are to grow into the joy of heavenly unselfish love by the patient, faithful and peace filled endurance of the life He has given us to glorify His name.

So how do we know what prayers will be answered, or whether we are receiving answers to prayer that are for our true benefit, but beyond our understanding. Jesus does not leave us to our own wits to find the answer. He not only tells us that if we pray to the Father in His name, that our prayers will be answered, He tells us how to pray.

That His Father’s Name is hallowed.

That His Kingdom come.

That His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

That we are forgiven our trespasses as we forgive those trespassing against us.

That we are led not into temptation.

That we are delivered from evil.

And we should continue to offer up the little personal prayers as well. After all, sometimes we are under attack and He will relieve us. Sometimes it His will that we be relieved of our distress to turn our hearts to Him and witness His glory to others. Sometimes, like Paul, when we pray for relief, we will be answered with an understanding of how our tribulation is good for our soul. Every time we pray to the Father, if we have faith in the name of Jesus Christ, our prayer will be answered. The answer won’t always be easily recognized, or timely by our earthly standards, but we know our prayers are being surely answered when we pray the way Jesus did, “if it be thy will, let this cup pass, nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.”

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