



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday May 6, 2018 - 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 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 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 this promise, “Ask and ye shall receive.” A comforting statement. It is as comforting a statement as God could possibly make to His Creatures. 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.

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 by 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 earthly aspirations. 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.

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 and faithful endurance of the life He has given us to glorify His name.

A wonderful example of that faithfulness was St Monica. She was the mother of St Augustine. She was also the bride of a violent alcoholic who brought with him an abusive mother in law. Monica early attempt to escape her unhappiness was through alcoholism. Her child, Augustine, was no treat either. By his own account he wasted his youth in wanton and riotous living.

Monica did two things to amend her life. She gave a good example, even when there was little hope that example would bear fruit, and she prayed continually for her family. Her husband and mother in law eventually were converted. Her son, who also seemed like such a lost cause, eventually became one of the great theologians, and more importantly a great saint.

St Monica had what we lack; perseverance in her prayer life and in the example that she lived. It is not farfetched to understand that on this Rogation Day, the garden we are given is the vegetable patch out our back doors. Our gardens are our families. The harvest for which we should pray is the conversion and sustenance of our families in their spiritual passage.

This Rogation Day, let us be thankful for those members of our families who have been faithful and fruitful, but also, let us be determined that by constant prayer and vigilance in the example we give, the Gospel we live through our lives, that we will be blessed in our harvest, a harvest of Godly children and parents and siblings who will be with us in the Light and Love of God forever.

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