

ROGATION IN THE CITY / ROGATION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Worship resources from the Rural Working Group for Rogation Sunday, 29th May 2011

Background

The word Rogation comes from the Latin, 'Rogare' which means to ask. It is thought that Rogation Sunday was originally so called because of the words in the Prayer Book gospel for the day:

"I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

John 14:13-14. NRSV

By the 16th century, the old Roman festival of 'Terminalia', or "boundaries", had been adapted by the church to serve a practical purpose: In days before Ordnance Survey maps, there were not always clear lines of demarcation between the parishes, especially where there were open field systems. A parish walk, known as 'Beating the Bounds' developed. During the procession, boys were bumped on prominent marks and boundary stones to ensure they never forgot the boundaries.

These rogation themes of blessing the fields and beating the bounds were commended in the 1630s by the poet George Herbert, that epitome of English country parsons. He said that processions should be encouraged for four reasons:

1. Firstly, a blessing of God for the fruits of the field.
2. Secondly; justice in the preservation of bounds.
3. Thirdly; charity in loving, walking and neighbourly accompanying one another, with reconciling of differences at the time if there be any.
4. Fourthly, mercie, in relieving the poor by a liberal distribution of alms.

In rural communities, a parish walk where gardens, crops and young farm animals are blessed often remains, along with other points where prayers for the needs of the rural communities. In the agricultural cycle, the main themes are seed sowing and the tending of the young plants and animals. We have to remember though that not all sowing takes place around Rogation, and neither does the birth and rearing of the young. These activities take place all the year round, but it is convenient to fix on one particular festival as the time to remember these before God in a public way.

Rogationtide starts on Rogation Sunday, which is celebrated on the fifth Sunday after Easter and includes the three weekdays before Ascension Day. Thus it takes place in the springtime, when there is a renewing of the earth, and it falls into the Easter cycle, the season of resurrection. Renewal and resurrection therefore are also underlying themes of this occasion, and so the celebration becomes very much the property of urban congregations too.

Contemporary issues.

These will include:-

1. The enjoyment by all of, and access to, parks and the countryside, conservation of species not directly offering economic profit to the owner or occupier of the land where they flourish.
2. A reconnection of humankind to God's natural world.
3. The ecological insight of the inter-relatedness of the created order.
4. Reflection upon human-kind's relationship to the natural order. What does it mean to "have dominion" under God over the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, the wild animals, and the reptiles, the plants bearing seed, the trees bearing fruit, the green plants? Are the words 'stewards' or 'managers' appropriate to describe this role?
5. The relief of the poor. Rogation Sunday often follows Christian Aid week, which in 2011 falls on the 15th-22nd May.
6. The Christian virtues associated with Rogation are hope and justice - and as George Herbert reminds us, there is always room for charity.

Rogation is just as valid for urban communities as it is for rural communities.

Worship Ideas

- Link the themes of reconciliation and renewal into your Rogation worship.
- Think about how both rural and urban dwellers are called to be stewards of God's creation.
- Link the service with a pet service, thinking about our responsibilities in having 'dominion under God over birds and animals'.
- Have a procession around your parish, in the tradition of the Beating the Bounds walks, to help the congregation to see God in the local community. Places you could stop and pray at could include:
 - A local pub – giving thanks for hospitality.
 - A closed factory – remembering those who are unemployed
 - A local business – praying for the ongoing sustainability of the local economy.
 - A shop or take-away restaurant – thanking God for our food.
 - Fields, allotments or a garden – asking for God's blessing on the rural economy and on those who care for the land.

- A charity shop – offering prayers for those who seek to serve others.
 - A homeless shelter – remembering those who are homeless or who are struggling with debt or financial pressures.
 - Another church of a different denomination – asking for Christian unity.
 - A religious building of another faith – asking for increased dialogue and understanding between the different faith communities. (With this and the previous suggestion, it could be possible to link with the community there for joint prayers of hope and promise.)
 - A wasteland or unauthorised tip – expressing regret and sorrow for our abuse of creation.
 - A local park or garden – giving thanks for God’s creation.
 - A playing field, leisure centre or cinema – giving thanks for our leisure opportunities.
 - Local school – offering prayers for the staff and children there.
- The same idea could be used within a church, having stations with photographs or other displays, alongside a parish map.

Worship Resources

Many useful prayers, readings, hymn suggestions and reflections are available from various books and web sites, including the following:

Times and Seasons (The Archbishop’s Council, Church House Publishing, 2006.)

Also available at: <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/41161/tsagyear.pdf>

Seasonal Worship from the Countryside (The Staffordshire Seven, SPCK, 2003)

The Arthur Rank Centre www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk

Farming Matters www.farmingmatters.org.uk/seasons/rogation

Christian Ecology Link www.christian-ecology.org.uk/resource

The Prayer Book Society www.pbs.org.uk

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