

## Readings for Rogation Sunday

14<sup>th</sup> May 2023

### First Reading: Deuteronomy 8:7-18

The LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you.

Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

### Second Reading: 1 Timothy 6:6-10

There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

### Gospel: St Matthew 6:25-33

Jesus said: “I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

## A Reflection for Rogation Sunday

If you are reading this reflection at home, I invite you to go outside if you are able and find somewhere to sit. If you are not able to do that, try to sit near an open window. Spend a few minutes simply noticing what is around you, breathing in the fresh air and listening, looking, smelling, touching ...

In this particular part of the world, we are very fortunate to live in a place of great beauty and peace. We are not under the constant threat of war or attack as so many people across the world are, nor do we live with a constant background of noise as so many in cities do. We don't have to go far to see the beauty of mountains and sea, to smell the flowers, to hear the birdsong. Although the produce of our land may differ, we can relate to the opening of today's reading from Deuteronomy:

The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity...

Rogationtide is a time to celebrate the wonders of God's creation, to remind ourselves how much we depend on the land and the sea for our food and wellbeing, to remember God's faithfulness to us and to count our blessings.

Rogation days, the three days before Ascension Day, so Monday to Wednesday of this coming week, are observed by many churches on the preceding Sunday – so today. The name 'Rogation' comes from the Latin, *rogare*, to ask. Coming in the springtime, a time of renewal and new birth, when new crops are being planted and new livestock being born, and in the Easter season in the church when we celebrate the new life and renewal of resurrection, it is traditionally a time to ask God's blessing on the land. As times have changed, and far fewer people live an agrarian life, it has been extended to include blessing of industry, business and all human labour.

But it is also more than simply seeking God's blessing on our endeavours. As long ago as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Anglican priest, poet and theologian, George Herbert described four different aspects of Rogation: to seek God's blessing on the fields; to seek preservation of justice, to walk in love with one another and reconcile differences; to practise mercy and generosity towards the poor from God's provision.

Here we see a wider understanding of Rogation as a time to seek God's blessing on the whole community for its wellbeing, to seek the common good, to recognise the needs of those denied their proper place in society. It is a time to get our hands dirty – not just in the garden but in getting involved to make our communities a better place for all.

Nowadays, we also have a greater understanding of how human activity has neglected or exploited the natural world in harmful ways, and of how human-induced climate change is destroying the lives and livelihoods of our fellow humans and the habitats of a wealth of other species.

Last week, I quoted from Archbishop William Temple, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, and I mentioned that, unusually for his time, he also understood the connection between God, people and the rest of creation. He said:

The treatment of the Earth by man the exploiter is not only imprudent, it is sacrilegious. We are not likely to correct our hideous mistakes in this realm until we recover the mystical sense of our oneness with nature. Many people think this is fantastic. I think it is fundamental to our sanity.

So, Rogation-tide is also an opportunity to repent of the harm that we are doing to God's good creation, directly or through the choices we make and the products we buy. Today's passage from Deuteronomy also contains a warning:

Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today.

And there is a related warning in St Paul's letter to Timothy:

But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

For us, living in the developed world with its well-established patterns of consumption and materialism, there is no doubt that we find this very difficult. We know that it is not the subsistence farmers of the Global South who are causing the environmental catastrophe although they are bearing the brunt of the effects of climate change. But what are we to do? There are clearly no easy answers – if there were, we would have done them long ago. To make significant and lasting changes will require all of us to make sacrifices in our lives. Are we willing to do that?

Today's Gospel urges us not to worry. However, I do not believe this is an invitation to carry on regardless because God will provide. Look at the beginning of the last sentence: Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...

As Christians, we cannot simply shrug our shoulders and carry on as if nothing is happening. We are responsible for the world – God has placed it in our care. We are called bring in the kingdom of God, to love our neighbours, to seek justice for them, to share what we have been given for the good of all. With God's help, we can and must change our ways. There are many things we already do, and there are many changes we can and should continue to make in our lives for the good of our world. In seeking the kingdom of God first, we are called to act, and it is only then that we need not worry, for God will take care of the rest.

Rogation days lead us into Ascension Day. As Jesus ascended to heaven so we, in the words of the Lord's Prayer, pray for that heavenly kingdom to come here on Earth. So, Rogation is, perhaps, a timely reminder that what we do here matters for eternity.