

# Easter 5 Rogation Sunday

## Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Ezek 34:25-31

Second Lesson: Luke 11:1-13

## Homily

Today is known as Rogation Sunday, and Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday appear in the Prayer Book as Rogation Days. These, the days leading up to Ascension Day, are days when the privilege of prayer is celebrated, historically there were processions held to pray for the fruitfulness of the spring planting, which also became a solemn march around the boundaries of the parish, and thus a prayer for all its people.

In our second lesson we hear one of the accounts of the giving of the Lord's Prayer. The disciples, like many of us, were a bit uncomfortable about this whole thing of praying, and asked their Teacher, "Lord, teach us to pray."

He gave them that brief outline that we recite

so often and so gladly,  
and on which  
we should be basing our longer prayers.  
Having done that, He went on.  
In short, pithy stories and examples,  
he brought the solid assurance  
that His Father and our Father  
would hear and answer prayer,  
if we pray,  
and if we pray as He taught us.

*Our Father which art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.*

First things first. It is for the glory of God,  
not to satisfy our desires.

*Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.*

with recognition that what we want may indeed not  
be in accordance with His will,  
which is His knowledge of what is best.

*Give us day by day our daily bread.*

Notice we do not have license  
to pray for piles of stuff,

or for permanent security,  
but for our needs as we need them.  
Greed is not acceptable in prayer,

*And forgive us our sins;  
for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.*

Ah, yes, the hard one.  
We seek forgiveness. Do we forgive?

If we hold back our forgiveness,  
we are perhaps asking him to hold back His.

*And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.*

And another hard one:  
"Lord, if it isn't good for me,  
if it's going to tempt me in way I can't handle,  
if it might lead me into evil,  
please, no matter how hard I ask,  
don't give it to me."

If we come to Our Father,  
in the way his only-begotten Son has taught us,  
we have His oft-repeated promise:

*Ask, and it shall be given you;*

*seek, and ye shall find;  
knock, and it shall be opened unto you.  
For every one that asketh receiveth;  
and he that seeketh findeth;  
and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

Would a father deny the request of his son  
for something he really needed?  
Maybe an earthly father will fail,  
but our Heavenly Father will not.  
Would a father give his son poison --  
even if the boy begged for it?  
One would hope not.  
Our Heavenly Father won't.

And, if we pray as Our Lord has taught us,  
we have the precious promises spoken so poetically  
by the Prophet Ezekiel, in the first lesson

*"... I will make with them a covenant of peace,  
and will cause the evil beasts  
to cease out of the land:  
and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness,  
... And I will make them  
and the places round about my hill a blessing;  
and I will cause the shower  
to come down in his season;  
there shall be showers of blessing.*

*...Thus shall they know  
that I the LORD their God am with them,  
and that they, even the house of Israel,  
are my people,  
saith the Lord GOD.  
And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men,  
and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD."*

Let us pray.

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, who knowest our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking; We beseech thee to have compassion upon our infirmities; and those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask, vouchsafe to give us, for the worthiness of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

# Easter 5 Rogation Sunday

## Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: 2 Esdras 14:27-35

Second Lesson: Acts 4:1-13, 33

## Homily

Lewis Carroll in the *Alice* books has the queen say something like this: "I make it a practice to believe two impossible things before breakfast."

Esdras, in the First Lesson, does something similar. He demands something impossible of the children of Israel, and thus of us. He observes that we ... *received the law of life, which [we] kept not*, observes that there are consequences, because God is a righteous judge, and continues:

*"And now are ye here, and your brethren among you.*

*Therefore if so be that ye will subdue your own understanding, and reform your hearts, ye shall be kept alive and after death ye shall obtain mercy. "*

Sounds like a pretty straightforward promise, doesn't it?

Is there a catch? Well . . .

Think on this for a moment:

Have you ever really tried

to subdue your own understanding?

How have you done in reforming your own heart?

We've probably all made the effort one time or another, maybe many times.

How have we done?

It's not a pretty story, is it?

We hear a very clear and sure promise to those who do make those changes inside themselves,

but, really, who can?

None of us can, by our own strength.

There's a promise, but there's a catch, as Esdras says:

*"... after death shall the judgment come, when we shall live again: and then shall the names of the righteous*

*be manifest,  
and the works of the ungodly shall be declared. "*

Which category do we fall in?  
Well, judging by our works, the news is not good.  
We sin and we keep on sinning,

no matter how hard we try, we mess up.  
Left to ourselves, we are the ungodly.  
And what saves this all from being a cruel joke?  
Esdras couldn't yet be specific,  
but his words,  
like the whole of the Old Testament,  
gain their full meaning  
in the person and work of Jesus Christ.  
In Him the impossible becomes a reality.  
The righteousness we simply can't achieve  
on our own  
is given us on His Cross  
and by the sanctification  
brought by His Holy Spirit.

*"Be it known unto you all,"*

says St. Peter in the Second Lesson,

*"and to all the people of Israel,  
that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,*

*whom ye crucified,  
whom God raised from the dead,  
even by him  
doth this man stand here before you whole."*

speaking of the lame man that had just been healed,  
but also of the crippled spirits if us sinners now,

*"This is the stone which was set at nought  
of you builders,  
which is become the head of the corner.  
Neither is there salvation in any other:  
for there is none other name under heaven  
given among men,  
whereby we must be saved. "*

And there it is.  
We try and we try and we try  
to be good enough to enter the kingdom of heaven,  
and we fail,  
because we cannot.  
We are too flawed and spotted.  
Often we join with the centurion in saying:  
*"Lord, I am not worthy  
that thou shouldest come under my roof."*  
and we aren't.  
But, by the Cross of Christ, we can go on,  
*"But speak the word only,*

*and my soul shall be healed"*

and so it shall,

for He has promised to do for us

what we cannot do for ourselves,

and so may we enter into the joys of the righteous.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, who alone gavest us the breath of life, and alone canst keep alive in us the holy desires thou dost impart; We beseech thee, for thy compassion's sake, to sanctify all our thoughts and endeavours; that we may neither begin an action without a pure intention nor continue it without thy blessing. And grant that, having the eyes of the mind opened to behold things invisible and unseen, we may in heart be inspired by thy wisdom, and in work be upheld by thy strength, and in the end be accepted of thee as thy faithful servants; through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

## Easter 5 Rogation Sunday

### Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Is 48:12-21

Second Lesson: Rev 5

### Homily

*"...I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne  
a book written within and on the backside,  
sealed with seven seals."*

What, precisely, is St. John going on about?

A book and seven seals, and all sorts of odd stuff.  
The Book of Revelation is full of such things.  
St. John's vision is certainly not easy to follow  
In fact, people attempting to make sense of it  
have often come up with  
bizarre and fanciful thoughts,  
sometimes with complicated schemes  
that do real harm.

Over and over again there have been alarms raised,  
specific programs of coming events constructed,  
doomsdays predicted, frauds perpetrated,  
fortunes lost, people hurt, and even battles fought -  
over what people have decided this Book has said.

This book has been used to produce so much harm  
that it has often been suggested  
that it should be neither read nor studied,  
and even that it doesn't belong in the Bible.  
But there it has been for many centuries.  
Holy Church decided long ago  
that this work is a full and equal part  
of the Canon of Holy Scripture,  
to be read as part of the Liturgy,  
to serve as the source of many of the most profound  
chants, hymns, and prayers of our worship.

But, if it gets misused so often, what is it for?

Certainly not an understandable blueprint of coming  
events.

As we read today:

*"... man in heaven, nor in earth,  
neither under the earth,  
was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.  
And I wept much,  
because no man was found worthy  
to open and to read the book,  
neither to look thereon.  
And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not:  
behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah,*

*the Root of David,  
hath prevailed to open the book,  
and to loose the seven seals thereof. "*

Do we have trouble understanding?  
It's supposed to be that way.  
Anyone who tells us that he has it all figured out  
-- and there are a multitude of them --  
is either fooling himself, or trying to fool others.  
There is One who unlocks those secrets,  
and only One, and even He, Jesus Himself,  
declared that only the Father knows  
the time and the season of His coming again.

So what is it for?  
Read on for the next few chapters.  
Read it in the light of what the Church has taught,  
against the background of the history we have seen.  
You'll find patterns that are always fresh,  
judgments that the world and the church  
always need to hear,

and a frighteningly firm declaration  
that God is not indifferent to sin.  
This one can find, but even this is not the purpose  
of the Book of Revelation.

What is it then?

**That we may know Jesus,**  
that we may know Him as Savior and Friend,  
but also as Judge.  
That we may know that we have offended,  
that we deserve every one of the plagues,  
every one of the sorrows described in this book,  
That, if we hold on to our sins,  
judgment will come, and after judgment, darkness.  
That we may know that this need not be,  
that the Lamb once slain is the full, perfect,  
and sufficient sacrifice for our sins,  
that, if we repent, and trust in Him,  
and receive His gifts,  
He will lift us up above those judgments.

We heard Isaiah:

*"Come ye near unto me, hear ye this;  
I have not spoken in secret from the beginning ...  
Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of  
Israel;  
I am the LORD thy God  
which teacheth thee to profit,  
which leadeth thee by the way  
that thou shouldest go.  
O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!  
then had thy peace been as a river,  
and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea:*

Our Lord opened that invitation yet more:

*"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,  
and I will give thee rest."*

That we may know Jesus,  
and that, knowing Him we may worship Him,  
and that our worship may be joined with angels,  
with archangels, and with all the company of heaven,  
in everlasting blessedness.

Let us pray, joining in those heavenly words John reported:

*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain  
to receive power, and riches, and wisdom,  
and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.  
Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power,  
be unto him that sitteth upon the throne,  
and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. Amen.*

## Easter 5 Rogation Sunday

### Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Ezek 36:25-38

Second Lesson: Mark 11:22-26

### Homily

The short little lesson from St. Mark we heard today carries the kind of punch to knock the wind out of one.

Our Lord begins with a short sentence, often quoted as a stand-alone proverb:

*"Have faith in God."*

and says astounding words about faith sufficient to cast mountains into the sea. In fact, says He,

*"What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. "*

One often hears foolish notions, sometimes quoting this passage,

to the effect that, if only we believe hard enough, what we want will become reality.

It's rather like Tinkerbelle in the Peter Pan story.

The fairy is dying, but if enough people believe hard enough, and applaud loud enough, that will all change.

Nonsense!

That simply isn't the way God has ordered His universe.

*"Have faith,"* Jesus said, not in your own desires, not in the things you might desire to have, but *"in God."*

That's to trust Him, to agree with Him, to accept and desire His will, as the Lord Himself prayed: *"Not my will, but thine be done."*

Notice the very next thing Jesus says: *"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."*

*But if ye do not forgive,  
neither will your Father which is in heaven  
forgive your trespasses."*

Does that mean that,  
no matter how hard I believe,  
I won't be forgiven if I don't forgive?  
That's what it says.  
Apparently this mountain-casting business  
has its limits.

Did you hear what Ezekiel the prophet quoted,  
as words from the mouth of God?

*"A new heart also will I give you,  
and a new spirit will I put within you:  
and I will take away the stony heart  
out of your flesh,  
and I will give you an heart of flesh.*

A new heart, a new spirit,  
a thoroughgoing change within,  
a healing of the hard-heartedness  
that stands between us  
and those we don't want to love.

Unforgiveness is a declaration of independence  
from God and his will,

an elevation of oneself to the very throne of God,  
the exact opposite to having faith in God.

He goes on:  
*And I will put my spirit within you,  
and cause you to walk in my statutes,  
and ye shall keep my judgments,  
and do them. "*

To be filled with the Spirit,  
is not to get all kinds of powers and gifts  
(although God can and does give such things),  
but to receive eyes to see and ears to hear,  
and a heart to obey the will of God.  
That is our purpose in being here.  
That is what God wishes to accomplish  
in and through us.  
We who consider ourselves the chosen of God  
may have a problem with what he says next:

*"Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD,"*

WHAT? !

But I thought it was for my sake.  
Didn't He die on the cross for MY sins?  
Well, yes, He did,  
but is that where it stops?  
Have you ever asked why He wants to save you?

Just listen . . .

*"the heathen that are left round about you  
know that I the LORD build the ruined places,  
and plant that that was desolate:  
I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it."*

He intends that in you, in all of us,  
a changed heart may be revealed,  
and that, in that changed heart,  
God may be seen,  
and what logical argument cannot accomplish,  
the example of God walking in His people *may*.

Let us pray.

Renew us, Lord, by the power of thy Spirit.  
Soften our hearts and make us able to forgive.  
Remake our desires to be thy desires.  
Use us to demonstrate thy great salvation,  
and may thy loving will be done.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.