

FRANCISCAN - MAY 2016

“A Publication of St. Francis Episcopal Church—“Proclaiming the Good News in word and deed.”

Rogation Days Honor God's Creation

Rogation Days are an ancient custom which has been being observed since the 5th century. Rogation—to ask, as in “interrogate”—we ask God’s blessing of the harvest, of the earth and sea. We remind ourselves that we are the stewards of Creation, neither the authors nor the owners of it. Originally an agricultural observance, it has been broadened and made more inclusive—the crops, the catch of the sea, the fruits of our labors in all their aspects.

An ancient pagan custom was “beating the bounds”, with a procession walking out the boundary lines of the village and marking the bounds with stakes. Sticks of willow and birch were used to strike the stakes; hence, “beating the bounds”. Subsequently the custom became incorporated into Rogation Days celebration, particularly in England, in which the parishes are clearly defined, contiguous with adjacent parishes. Rogation Day was celebrated by walking the boundaries of the parish and acknowledging in this way our tangible stewardship.

Rogation Days are to honor God for all of creation, and to pray for the land and sea and the gifts of labor, and for the needs of all. The traditional Rogation Days are the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Ascension Day. Rogation Sunday is the Sixth Sunday after Easter.

As the countries, including our own, became more industrialized and less agrarian, we have seen a lessening of the celebration of Rogation. At St. Francis this year we observed Rogation Sunday with hymns and prayers that remind us that Rogation Days are privileged times to celebrate stewardship, to remind ourselves of our roles, not as masters or owners, but as stewards. A special outdoor workday and planting day was also held this year on the church's grounds.

St. Francis, in his “Canticle of Brother Sun”, wrote: “May thou be praised, my Lord, for our sister, mother earth, who sustains and governs and produces fruits with colored flowers and green plants.” In the Book of Common Prayer, there are three prayers for Rogation Days (pages 258 and 259) as well as Prayers for the Natural Order beginning on page 827 and Thanksgivings for the Natural Order on page 840. The third prayer for Rogation Days places an emphasis on stewardship of creation:

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Ascension Thursday Celebration

Forty days after Easter Sunday, which always falls on a Thursday, we celebrate the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ, a major feast in the Christian calendar. On that day we remember and honor the last section of the three-part Easter Event: Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension. At St. Francis this year we will gather on Thursday, April 28, at 6:00 p.m. for a potluck dinner followed by a service at 7:00 p.m.

This year's service will be Holy Eucharist, Rite II, preceded by Stations of the Resurrection. In the style and format of the Stations of the Cross, the fourteen Stations of the Resurrection feature scripture readings of the post-resurrection appearances of Christ. As we process around the nave, we stop at each station for a reading and prayer. Concluding with a prayer at the altar, we exchange the Peace and continue with Holy Communion.

Even though it is a major feast of the church, Ascension Day is often ignored by Christian churches because it falls on a weekday. Some celebrate "Ascension Sunday," moving the observance to the first Sunday after Ascension Day. At St. Francis we will do both but strive to give the actual holy day its full honor in our celebration.