

**By: J. Fletcher Lowe, Jr.**

The 1979 revision of The Book of Common Prayer appears to have downgraded Rogation--and well it might. We no longer live in a society dominated by agriculture and fishing. We are no longer a predominantly rural society. That's what Rogation represented--the blessing of the fields and seeds and farming implements and animals and of boats and nets and bait. In order to keep this rural-based tradition alive, some suburban congregations began to process around their parking lots, planting trees! That trivialized what Rogation symbolized.

Rogation represented the dependence upon God from the very beginning of the production cycles--on the farm, on the boat. Even though our societal focus has shifted, the dependence has not. In our industrialized, service-oriented world, we continue to be dependent upon the Lord for all that we have and all that we are. We may be more removed from the exigencies of nature, more removed from the cycles of rain and sun and wind and calm as they affect our work. Yet, not only are we just as dependent upon God for the food that comes from farm and boat but dependent too for all of the raw materials we use in production and all the gifts and abilities we bring to produce and service them.

That dependence, especially in our modern world, needs to be made more visible. The Rogation days, including the Sixth Sunday after Easter, provide us with the opportunity. Undergirding the farm and the boat is the common reality all of us share, no matter what we produce--our dependence upon the Lord's bounty. We need to ask his blessing (Rogation from the Latin *rogare*--to ask) upon the means we each use to produce.

The Rogation days are about a specific focus of prayer which needs our attention. This is no more pointedly expressed than was done by Kenneth Adams in a Church Times article:

"We pray for good relationships in industry and for the just distribution of the fruits of the earth, but we do not pray for that activity which is the reason for the existence of those relationships and which produces the 'fruits' which we pray maybe justly distributed."

"We pray for what flows from industrial production without praying for industry itself and for all those who engage in it. We pray for the unemployed, but we fail to pray for the activity which will provide them with employment or which will produce the surplus wealth to allow them to be employed in other work."

#### MEANS OF PRODUCTION

"We pray for the hungry and the homeless, yet we fail to pray for the better industrial production which alone will produce the food and build the houses. We are glad that we can give grain to the starving people of Africa, but do we give thanks to God for those who produced that grain and for those who designed and manufactured the ships and aircraft and vehicles without which that grain could never have been delivered to those who need it?"

For Christians in this modern world, Rogation becomes not only a liturgical opportunity, but a deeply significant moment to remember that God is behind and before, above and beneath all we do.

With that in mind, here are some experiences with Rogation:

On Rogation Sunday (no longer identified in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, although the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday following it are), the Sixth Sunday of Easter, the offering of the people includes a small symbol of the means of production of each person

participating, i.e., a computer chip, a sales contract, a prescription pad, a tool, an appointment book, a pencil. A new mother set up a tradition for mothers by offering a diaper! The baptismal font might be appropriate for them to be placed, connecting our offering of our labor to our baptism. Along with the offering of bread, wine and alms, the symbols are also offered (and later returned to their owners).

On Rogation Sunday, the celebrant's concluding collect to the Prayers of the People could be those appropriate for people in an industrial society: e.g., BCP, p. 256 (15, 111), p. 259 (19, 11).

On Rogation Sunday, all who choose to participate join in a recommitment of their work to the Lord. So often we commission vestries and wardens, choirs, altar guilds, church school teachers-and rightly so. But we fail to give liturgical prominence to the primary arena of the congregations' individual ministries-where people work.

There are several appropriate hymns in The Hymnal 1982 under Christian Responsibility, numbers 566 through 612.

On any day, arrange for a liturgy similar to the blessing of homes to bless the place of a person's ministry. I have experienced the significance of this in a person's individual office space at lunch time; more broadly, in a small town publisher's office building late one weekday afternoon; and about the grounds of a road construction company immediately following the Sunday Eucharist with the coffee hour there at the plant.

Periodically (such as every month in which there is a fifth Sunday), offer people the opportunity to recommit their work, especially in time of transition: promotion, new job, job loss, retirement, or volunteer endeavor. The first couple of times I offered this I was a bit anxious about people coming forward, so I primed the pump a bit. There was no need to. People seemed energized by the opportunity to offer their daily life and work to God.

"I am only a supervisor in a textile mill," a man once said to me. He only saw his work as something to do to make a living for his family. There was little sense of ministry, of vocation. He saw that far more clearly in his "work" as a member of the vestry, a lay reader, and a church school teacher. Strange how we separate the sacred from the secular, the holy from the common, the spiritual from the material. As we talked further, I suggested that he consider his supervisor's position as his primary ministry, as a real calling from the Lord. He'd never thought of it that way, but as he did, his work took on a new dimension. He asked (rogare) God to bless the "means of production" he used as a supervisor, to bless his work. The problems did not diminish, but his perspective changed, and his work was transformed into ministry, part of his offering to God.

That is the natural consequence of what originated with the Rogation Days. The opportunity to pause-on farm and on boat-to ask God's blessings upon the means of production-to offer one's work as ministry, as calling. Though society has changed, the basic orientation of Rogation has not. We can use those Rogation days to affirm and confirm the work of Christians today as indeed the call of God to special ministry in his name in his world, dependent upon his grace and love.

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