

Easter VI

“The earth has brought forth her increase; may God, our own God, give us his blessing.”

These words come from a Psalmist to give thanks to God for bringing forth a good harvest and requesting God to continue His blessings. Since the sixth century of the Common Era this day has been referred to as Rogation Sunday; rogation in Latin means “asking.” This Thursday is Ascension Day and traditionally the three days before Ascension Day are referred to as Rogation Days. Historically in England these days preceded the planting season and thus they became three days of asking God to provide for a good harvest. In our country these days became associated not only with planting but with the value of rural life in general. For me, the significance of these days goes beyond issues of planting and harvesting in the agrarian sense of the words. For me, these three days serve as sacramentals, they represent something beyond themselves. They represent two things: first, the value of asking for assistance and secondly, that request implies that I-we are not self-sufficient.

There is something about America and we as Americans that almost glorifies self-sufficiency. It comes in part from our early colonial days and certainly from our frontier days and maybe a Calvinistic influence as well. Self-sufficiency as a mantra sounds like a good thing. It implies hard work, taking care of one’s self and ambition. The downside is that we might come to believe that we really are self-sufficient; that somehow I am the creator and sustainer of my life; I provide the necessary ingredients for wholeness and personal fulfillment. I do not believe that is the way we were created in the mind of God.

One of the earliest mythical stories in the Old Testament has God stating that it was not good for Adam to be alone; he needed a help-mate and God brought forth Eve. Look around at our lives; we have neighbors to help us, doctors to heal us, police and fireman to protect

us, shopkeepers to sell us goods; and the shopkeepers are dependent upon customers, we are blessed with teachers to inspire and challenge our children, we have spouses who care for and raise up one another, parents to tend, love and guide us. We are co-dependent people and it is healthy to acknowledge that co-dependency.

An essential part of that healthiness is the willingness to ask for guidance, support and strength from one another. We, as the early Psalmist, are called to beseech God to support and strengthen us in all aspects of our lives. I am convinced that the most significant way God offers His support to us on a daily basis is through the lives of those whom we allow into our lives. There are times in our lives when burdens not only seem to be but are excessive. There are times when relationships, including those with whom we are most intimate, become strained. There are times when parents become extremely frustrated with their children and when children perceive they are put down and misunderstood by their parents. Some of these are the normal hills and valleys of life but sometimes they become high mountains or deep chasms. We do not have to travel those enormous heights or frightening depths alone. We need to ask someone to be with us; God certainly, but also those emissaries of God who surround us and whom we trust--our neighbors, our uncle, our brother or sister, our spouse, our parent, our doctor, our priest. For a person to refuse to seek help may be a sign of self-sufficiency; it is also a sign of weakness. It takes enormous strength to acknowledge I have a problem; to acknowledge that I cannot see a way to get through this by myself and to request someone to help me travel through whatever is burdening my soul and my life at this given time.

The church has given us a sacramental; the church says to us that such moments are days of rogation, days of asking and they are appropriate and holy days that lead to cleansing and wholeness and peace.

Amen