

V Easter 2024 (Rogation Sunday)

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

St. James 1.22-27 St. John 16.23-33



What does it mean to be a “religious” person? If we take what James says in this morning’s Epistle seriously, it means more than attending Sunday Mass, the Discussion Group, Lenten Services or even reading the Bible. Listening to God’s Word must lead us into doing good works.

Today is the Fifth and last Sunday in the Season of Easter called Rogation Sunday. We’re entering the short transitional Season of Rogationtide leading up to the Ascension Day, which is this coming Thursday.

The word **rogation** comes from the Latin verb **rogare**...meaning **to ask**. We also see **rogare** in words like **interrogate**...to ask or question systematically; **abrogate**...to ask or propose an end to something; **subrogate**...to substitute a right or claim.

Rogation Sunday and the three Rogation Days that follow began in the 5th Century as days of solemn prayer asking God to bless the seeds farmers planted and that they would produce a bountiful harvest in the fall.

Most of us don’t think much about what it takes to put food on our tables. We just head to Safeway or Whole Foods or wherever we like to shop and buy our food. We need to take time to ask God to bless the modern-day farmers who often face daunting challenges.

It also became popular in the 5th Century for parish churches to “beat the bounds” by holding processions marking the parishes’ geographical boundaries. This was all part of asking God to bless the farmer’s seeds and crops. Today we will hold our own mini “beating the bounds” by blessing the seeds planted by the Pre-school and the other plants in our Saint Francis Garden.

In the Collect for Rogation Sunday we ask God who we acknowledge is the source of all good things, to fill us with his Holy Spirit so we will think good things and then go out and do good things. James tells us to take the Good News we hear about Jesus and then go into action. James has an interesting way of making his point.

In James’ short parable about a man who looks at himself in a mirror, the man only sees a reflection of himself. It’s not his true image. He might actually like what he sees in the mirror. But the mirror doesn’t reflect what is in the man’s heart. Remember the evil queen in “Snow White” was very beautiful. She liked what she saw in the mirror, but she was a proud and arrogant woman. God sees directly into our hearts.

Rogation Sunday is about re-orienting our lives to prayer and asking God for what we need to do his work and to help others. In the Gospel, Jesus tells us the Father will give us whatever we ask of him in Jesus’ Name. We might want that expensive car or to win the lottery. We might get that car or win the lottery. Material things are not bad, but we should be asking God for what we need. That shows we trust him. And we want to be good stewards of the things he does give us.

Part of what it means to be good stewards of God’s gifts is to recognize our responsibility as mature Christians to share what we have with those who are less fortunate. Social welfare programs did not exist in James’ time. Widows and orphans faced homelessness and starvation unless they had family or friends to help them.

If we fast-forward to today...Covid shut businesses down and put many families and individuals on the streets. The best way we can help people in need is to contribute to CALL Primrose or other organizations that can provide food and other services to people who have nothing. When James tells us to take care of widows and orphans he means take care of anyone who needs help! Doing what’s best for others is what Christian love is all about.

“Religious” people, James would tell us, don’t wear their religion like a badge. Although there is that t-shirt that reads: “Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use shirts!”

While we’re “beating the bounds” in our Saint Francis Garden...let’s ask God not only to bless the seeds planted in the Garden...but bless the seed planted in our hearts...so that blessed by the Holy Spirit...we will grow and think and do good things.

