

I speak to you in the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. *Amen.*

Just as we did last year on the sixth Sunday of Easter, today we're celebrating Rogation Day. You may remember that the term "rogation" literally means "asking," and that's what we're doing today. By giving thanks for God's gift of creation, we acknowledge once again that everything comes from God, so we ask for God's blessings on the earth, and especially on the plants grown in gardens and farms that will feed and clothe us, so that their harvest may be plentiful for all. Our contemporary observance of Rogation days is quite different than the way our ancestors observed it. For them, the three Rogation Days that precede Ascension Day were an important religious observance with solemn prayers and fasting. Until the world became industrialized and automated, people relied on God to provide what they needed and *acknowledged* that God is the provider, so they approached these days with humility and reverence. For us it is less solemn and more celebratory. Our abilities to be stewards of the earth, as God charged humankind to be at creation, have changed dramatically over the years. Agriculture has become a serious scientific endeavor, and most of us would probably be astounded, then dismayed, if we knew the details of what really goes on in the production of the crops that sustain our lives.

At the offertory today, we'll be blessing seedlings grown by Liz and James Segers and Bill Coxe, who invite us to take a plant home and see what we can do with it. After the 10:30 service, we'll go back to the Lettuce Grow garden behind the Parish House, and bless the plants there which are being tended by several of our St. Francis farmers. To all of these folks, we say thank you, and we also thank God for giving you the gift of green thumbs, as well as the gift of joy and fulfillment that is yours when you're using your God-given gifts. Thank you for sharing with us. May God bless your work in God's dirt.

The lessons we've heard today come from three different lectionary years and seasons, so we hear them at other times but in different contexts. Put together as they are today, they emphasize God's generosity and remind us that what we have didn't just drop into our laps because we're lucky, but came to us because we are God's children and God loves us.

In Deuteronomy, when Moses says, "Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God," he's being proactive. He knows that once the Israelites get to the Promised Land, their lives will be significantly easier and more prosperous than during the Exodus. Moses knows that once they get comfortable, they'll be more independent and less reliant on God, forgetting how many times God has bailed them out of whatever mess they've been in, or has provided what they needed when they had no way to provide it for themselves. There's a lesson in that for us, of course, because we're much like those ancient Israelites in Canaan, but also as they wandered in the desert. We, too, find it easy to complain and argue and criticize, although hopefully not *at* God as the Israelites did during the Exodus. Likewise, when we have not only what we *need*, but also much of what we *want*, it's easy to forget the source of our blessings.

The Letter of James is said to be a letter in literary form only, not a real piece of correspondence. But James, whoever he was, writes as to an audience, correctly presuming that it will, in fact, be read and studied someday. He addresses it to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion, a community guided by leaders and teachers. Verse 16, which begins our passage today, acts as a bridge between the first fifteen verses of Chapter 1 and those that follow, so his words, "Do not be deceived, my beloved," may appropriately be connected to either what precedes or follows them.

In the first part of the chapter James encourages his readers to be strong in their faith, and also reminds them of the pitfalls that may be encountered by those who are rich. What follows—the part we hear today—is something like a morality lesson, a prescription for living in a community

centered in God, seeking to follow Christ. The essential verse for us to hear today is one we all know well: “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” Just as Moses did, James reminds us that God is a consistent and generous giver, and the source of all of our blessings. “Do not be deceived” into thinking your gifts come from anyone other than God. In the verses that follow, he explains what we must do to live in right relationship with God and others, giving us rules for living based on the laws of ancient Judaism and the teachings of Christ.

Finally today we hear Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, which gives us words to ask God for what we need. It’s interesting to compare these verses to Matthew’s version of this prayer, and then to look at how we pray it today, but that is not the point. The point is in the asking. There’s no mention of what we might want, like a fancy car, or a big house, or anything else that isn’t essential, only what we *need*—enough. Although Jesus doesn’t specifically mention the effects of having more than enough, he does make a subtle connection in his mention of the “evil” ones who know “how to give good gifts” to their children. And now we see that the theme that began in Deuteronomy and continued in the Letter of James is also in the words of Christ, a common teaching that hasn’t changed through all the years since God created the earth and everything in it, including us. The teaching is this: We are to ask God for what we need in order to live in God’s kingdom, relying on God to provide us with food to eat, forgiveness when we sin against God or one another, and protection from any evil that may assault us. In his words, “for everyone who asks, receives...,” Jesus assures that God will give us what we ask for.

So, then, what are we to do with and for the blessings God has given us? If there is any question we’re to ask today, surely that is it. We know that we’re expected to thank and praise and glorify God, as Canticle 12 directs us to do. Is there anything else? Whenever we read or hear or study scripture, it’s for a reason, for more than one reason. First, of course, we open ourselves to its instruction through the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit. And then we are to explore how our life may be changed by following that instruction. James answers the question in part in today’s passage, by telling us who we are to be as Christ’s own people, but it is Christ himself who, in a very subtle way, tells us what to do in today’s short parable about a friend with a need. Jesus’ instruction about this situation where one friend refuses to get out of bed to help another is told to remind us to be persistent in our asking. But I can’t read that without thinking that it’s a shame for someone who’s in need to have to be persistent in order to get what he needs.

Everything we’re called to do and be in our lives as followers of Christ is colored by his great commandment to us, and love is at its very center. Love God, love your neighbor. Ask God to bless you because God loves you and will honor your request. If God loves us and we love God, surely, surely we’re not meant to hoard either God’s love or God’s blessings. And that means that whatever God gives to us, we are to give back to God, who often wears the face of a friend, and even more often the face of stranger who seeks God’s blessings just as we do. I’ll bet you didn’t imagine I would talk with you about stewardship today, but in a quiet and subtle way, that’s the message for us to hear today. God will give us whatever we ask for in the name of Christ, and often even more, as most of us know. Perhaps God is counting on us to bless others by sharing the excess. I’m certain that when we follow God’s example of generosity, we’ll *know* deep in our hearts that it’s what we’re meant to do with God’s blessings.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, we thank you for making the earth fruitful, so that it might produce what is needed for life: Bless those who work in the fields; give us seasonable weather; and grant that we may all share the fruits of the earth, rejoicing in your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*