

# Rogation

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Of all the festivals in the Church's year, Rogation is, to me, one of the happiest. Christ seems so near to God's creation – to the land and to the animals.

Rogation is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as a 'litany of the saints chanted on the three days before Ascension Day' - a time when we thank God for the gift of creation.

Animals have always played a large part in my life; first, as a farmer's daughter, where animals were our livelihood; then later when I kept sheep and goats of my own, and always my beloved dogs.

When I lived in Northamptonshire, our nearest neighbours and good friends were farmers. On Rogation Sunday morning we set out bales of straw in their farmyard and listened to the sermon. We sang 'All things bright and beautiful' – what could have been more appropriate!

One year at Rogation-tide, I was staying with my daughter in Buntingford. There was to be a service in a seldom-used church some miles distant. My two little granddaughters and I set out, the two-year-old in a buggy and the four-year-old toddling beside – it was very hot! But when we reached the church it was all worthwhile. What a variety of animals: horses, cattle, sheep, dogs, cats, rabbits and even a tortoise. We sat in the sun, which seemed to shine every Rogation, and listened to the service and thanked God.

I am sure that God will remember what we think of the rest of his creation. I picture that in heaven his beloved animals will cluster round his feet in adoration. He was surrounded by animals at his birth as the Saviour of the World. It is my belief that they will be there with Him in glory.

## More about Rogation

The word comes from the Latin *rogare* – to ask. Rogation Days are set apart to bless the fields, and invoke God's mercy on all creation. Until recently the four days before Ascension Day (Sunday to Wednesday) were so designated. When the liturgical calendar

was reformed in 1976, the three weekdays before Ascension Day were retained as an optional observance. This year the Rogation Days are May 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup>.

Based on Roman precedents, Rogation Days were first instituted as a Christian observance in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century by Mamertus, bishop of Vienne in France from 461 to 475. During his episcopate, France was in an almost continuous state of near-disaster. The Goths invaded. There was much disease, many fires, and frequent attacks of wild animals. As a result, Mamertus spent a great deal of time in prayer, beseeching God to help the stricken community.

One night, when the village was overwhelmed with a fire, he conceived the idea of instituting an annual procession and "rogation" - or "litany" - in which the entire community would pray for God's blessing and protection. "We shall pray to God," he said, "that He will turn away the plagues from us, and preserve us from all ill, from hail and drought, fire and pestilence, and from the fury of our enemies; to give us favourable seasons, that our land may be fertile, good weather and good health, and that we may have peace and tranquillity, and obtain pardon for our sins."

The faithful typically observed Rogation by fasting in preparation to celebrate the Ascension, and farmers often had their crops blessed by a priest at this time.

A common feature of Rogation days was the ceremony of processing around the perimeter of the parish while invoking a Litany of the Saints. Over the centuries, it became the custom to also use the procession to "beat the bounds" - mark and establish the boundaries of the parish, while also blessing the trees, stones and fields. In modern times, the purpose of "beating the bounds" - to impress the boundaries of the village on everyone's mind - has receded, and it is now largely ceremonial.

Information from wikipedia and liturgies.net