

*“Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full”* (the Gospel).

Rogation means asking, and the days before Ascension Day this coming Thursday were traditionally times of prayers for the crops. However, the Reformation put a stop to all that, merely allowing the “beating of the bounds” to continue for secular reasons.

Unlike most people, I have been an allotment gardener and so directly interested in my own crops, though my survival did not depend on them. But we all need food.

Now it is common teaching in the church, and you may well have heard it from me, that asking is the lowest form of prayer. We should be giving priority to thanksgiving and worship.

Certainly we ought to practice all these forms of prayer. It is quite right that this act of worship is named after thanksgiving (Eucharist means that and the basic logic of the rite is to give thanks for God's mighty works over the bread and wine) but it also gives time to worship (for example the Gloria) and to asking (the prayer for the whole state of Christ's Church).

But perhaps the New Testament gives rather more priority to asking than common teaching suggests. The Lord's Prayer in St. Luke's version (I quote from the Revised Version) rushes rather quickly over worship *“Father, hallowed be thy name”* into asking *“thy kingdom, come, give us day by day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we ourselves also forgive everyone that is indebted to us. And bring us not into temptation”*. This indeed seems to be characteristic of our Lord's own prayer. It is largely asking, offered to the Father on a basis of confident trust.

Let us be honest. It is the prayer of those with little enough in worldly terms for just enough to continue. After our Lord, the person who best understood that life and followed it was St. Francis, with such other religious as took the vow of poverty seriously for both themselves and their Order. That is not our life, though it may be the life of some of our brethren in central America, in Africa and India. We know there are many richer than ourselves; true, but there are many poorer and we should not pretend to be as close to poverty as our Lord was in his earthly ministry.

The Father has put us where we are, and the call to give away everything that we have is not addressed to all of us. God does not want the world to collapse, and, surprising though it may seem, buying and selling, employment and business are all when well practised aspects of the love of neighbour; not something alien from the Gospel in themselves, though like anything else they may be perverted. Not least, we may come to trust in things (or secular skills) not in the Father. But it is never suggested that trust in the Father is all that is needed and we can stop working!

So we should be asking, with confidence, for what we do need - knowing that the Father knows what we need before we ask and that, however badly damaged by sin, this is still his world which he blesses. If we rightly wish to give thanks (later in the year) for the harvest, then we should indeed be asking his blessing on the growing crops. Food is one of the clearest tokens of our daily needs.

*The sermon relates to the Rogations. Strictly, the Sunday is not itself a rogation day.*