

## **A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Easter, May 10, 2026**

*The Epistle, James 1:22-27 - The Gospel, St. John 16:23-33*

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This Thursday is Ascension Day. Ascension Day is the end of the forty day season of Easter. This fifth and last Sunday after Easter is also called “Rogation Sunday.” The three days before Ascension Day are “rogation days.” The word rogation comes from a Latin word that means “to ask.” Historically, the rogation days were days of prayer for a good harvest. Often, the litany was prayed in procession around the boundaries of the city for this intention.

For most of human history, faith in God was inseparable from agriculture. The word agriculture is a combination of “agra,” which means land and “culture.” In origin it refers to a religious culture centered on the cycles of planting and harvesting. The religious culture established by God in the Torah is rooted in the land. The industrial revolution separated most of us from agrarian cycles, and we are spiritually poorer for it. This is not naive nostalgia for a bygone era. It is a simple truth. If God reveals himself through the cycles of planting and harvesting, then moving away from those cycles obscures for us certain aspects of God’s revelation.

When we move away from the land, we move away from the natural sense of the creation as a gift. We also move away from a clearer sense of our dependency upon the giver of the gift. Before modern methods of irrigation and pest control, prayers for rain and protection of the crops from blight were prayers for the ability to eat. Drought and famine were catastrophic and life-threatening, as they still are in many parts of the world. Now, in the developed world, drought means we buy our food somewhere else.

This is in general a good thing, but faith understands there are nuances to that good. The technology that frees us from living hand to mouth also gives us a sense of freedom from having to depend upon God. Instead, we trust in science, technology, insurance, savings, and medicine. These things can be viewed as gifts, received with thanksgiving, and used faithfully. But they can also become idols that we trust in and depend upon instead of God. While they provide us with good things, they do not save us from sin and death and give us eternal life.

The cycles of nature are a central analogy for life in Christ. New life is planted within us in baptism and grows according to the principles of nature we observe in the field. During Easter, we proclaim, “Christ is risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20). Pentecost completes the harvest. The Holy Spirit descends and raises us to new life in Christ.

The faith and faithfulness of Jesus, expressed in his prayer, is the foundation for the resurrection harvest. He was obedient unto death. Therefore, God raised him up (Phil 2:8-9). He prayed in the garden, “If you are willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus prayed on the cross, “Into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). As we learn to surrender to God’s will in our trials and commit our souls to him, we are raised from “the death of sin unto the life of righteousness.” Our lives produce “the fruits of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22-23).

When we neglect prayer, we abandon faith and faithfulness. We depend on our own wisdom and resources. Like the rocky and weed-filled soils in the Parable of the Sower and the Seed (Matt. 13:20-22), our hardened hearts become closed to the power of God’s Spirit. Our lives produce no

fruit. As Jesus said, “He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

We are pulled away from prayer by our anxiety and the idol of busy-ness. Prayer can feel like we are just sitting there getting nothing done. When asked about our lives, we often say that we are “busy.” We do not examine this word critically enough. Busy with what? Towards what end? A farmer can be busy with work that will produce a crop. But we can also be anxiously busy with tasks that distract us from our central vocation of worship and service and produce nothing worthwhile in the long run.

Prayer is not opposed to work. Jesus prayed constantly and also worked hard. St. Paul counsels us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), but also bragged that he “labored more abundantly” than all of the other apostles” (1 Cor. 5:10). Our Rule of Prayer is built upon Benedictine spirituality, which teaches that prayer is work and work is prayer. Morning Prayer leads us into our daily work, after which we return to Evening Prayer.

Through our habits of prayer we remember who God is and who we are in relationship to him. We remember the value of other people as bearers of God’s image. We remember that our vocation is to do good work to the glory of God—and not merely to make money or accomplish results. Through prayer we receive wisdom, inspiration, and direction. Our work comes to be rooted “in Christ” as the visible expression or fruit of our prayer.

The Rogation Sunday lessons combine the themes of prayer and work. Jesus said, “Ask and you shall receive that your joy may be full.” St. James writes, “Be doers of the word and not hearers only.” The connection should be clear. We pray for the wisdom and direction to do the will of God. When we are led by grace to do God’s will, our joy is full and we are blessed in our work.

Without prayer, there are too many things to do and not enough time to do them. There are too many distractions and problems and the challenges are too big. Through prayer we learn that God has given us just the right amount of time to do exactly the things he is calling us to do. Prayer gives us the wisdom and humility to know what we should do and also what we should not do. Prayer makes us much more efficient. As Mother Theresa was purported to have said, “If I did not pray three hours a day, I’d never get anything done.”

This is the pattern of the liturgy. We come to the altar to offer ourselves, our souls, and our bodies to God. We offer our confessions, intercessions, doubts, and uncertainties. We offer to God the big, confusing picture. God gives us back forgiveness, healing, wisdom, strength, and direction. He gives us our particular vocation to do the particular good works that he has prepared for each of us to walk in. We bring to God our disorder and chaos. From this, God brings forth the order and beauty of his new creation.

Rogation Sunday challenges us to reconsider the place of prayer in our lives. Human ingenuity may help us with efficiency and productivity, but the good harvest of virtue, holiness, peace, and blessing from God depends upon our faithfulness in our prayer. Rogation Sunday exhorts us to persevere in our Rule of prayer like farmers who want God to bless the harvest. As Jesus said in the gospel, “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”