Holy Trinity East Peckham

Sermon 26th April 2020

Easter II

Yesterday was the feast of St. Mark the Evangelist, also the Greater Rogation, which actually has nothing to do with St. Mark.

There are 3 more Lesser Rogations on the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday before Ascension Day.

The Rogation processions were very popular in earlier times. They originated in the Diocese of Vienne in south east Gaul in the 5th Century and were ordered by the bishop there after a series of volcanic eruptions, so the processions were to plead God’s mercy in a time of natural disaster and Litanies were sung. (Litany means supplication).

The Greater Rogation yesterday is the earlier one and is simply a Christian take-over of a pre-Christian perambulation of the fields to ward off mildew on the crops.

Our tradition is to sing the Litany of the Saints which includes pleading the mysteries of Christ’s Incarnation, Advent, Nativity, Baptism & Fasting, Cross & Passion, Death & Burial, holy Resurrection, wonderful Ascension, the Coming of the Holy Spirit and the Day of Judgement. Pleading these saving aspects of Christ’s life before the Father.

The Rogations were suppressed in 1552 but revived by Queen Elizabeth’s injunctions of 1557, so much were they valued as a powerful form of prayer.

We have a very acceptable Litany in the Book of Common Prayer and I suggest that we use this ancient form of prayer in the days running up to Ascension Day in May to guard us against the present peril.

The ancient forms of prayer that the Church directs us to use are not just quaint or decorative; they are effective and have substance.

So, let us heed the words of the risen Jesus to the sceptical Thomas, “Stop doubting and believe”.

Then we shall be able to cry out with Thomas, “My Lord and my God!”

Anthony