

Rogation Days – definitions and resources

How to mark rogation days during a pandemic

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Rogation Days from the Episcopal Church Glossary

Traditionally, these are the three days before Ascension Day on which the litany is sung (or recited) in procession as an act of intercession. They originated in Vienne, France, in the fifth century when Bishop Mamertus introduced days of fasting and prayer to ward off a threatened disaster. In England they were associated with the blessing of the fields at planting. The vicar "beat the bounds" of the parish, processing around the fields reciting psalms and the litany. In the United States they have been associated with rural life and with agriculture and fishing. The propers in the BCP (pp. 207-208, 258-259, 930) have widened their scope to include commerce and industry and the stewardship of creation. The BCP also permits their celebration at other times to accommodate different regional growing seasons. The BOS contains material for a Rogation procession, including petitions to be added to the Great Litany and the prayers of the people. The term is from the Latin *rogatio*, "asking."

<https://episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/rogation-days>

From **Wikipedia** – apparently the Roman Catholic dating system.

Rogation days are days of prayer and fasting in [Western Christianity](#). They are observed with processions and the [Litany of the Saints](#). The so-called *major* rogation is held on 25 April;^[1] the *minor* rogations are held on Monday to Wednesday preceding [Ascension Thursday](#).^[2] The word *rogation* comes from the [Latin](#) verb *rogare*, meaning "to ask", which reflects the beseeching of God for the appeasement of his anger and for protection from calamities.

The Christian major rogation replaced a pagan [Roman](#) procession known as [Robigalia](#), at which a dog was sacrificed to propitiate Robigus, the deity of agricultural disease.^{[5][3]} The practitioners observing Robigalia asked Robigus for protection of their crops from [wheat rust](#).^[3]

The faithful typically observed the Rogation days by [fasting and abstinence](#) in preparation to celebrate the [Ascension](#), and farmers often had their crops blessed by a priest at this time.^[7] Violet [vestments](#) are worn at the rogation litany and its associated Mass, regardless of what colour is worn at the ordinary liturgies of the day.^[3]

A common feature of Rogation days in former times was the ceremony of [beating the bounds](#), in which a procession of parishioners, led by the minister, churchwarden, and [choirboys](#), would proceed around the boundary of their [parish](#) and pray for its protection in the forthcoming year. This was also known as 'Gang-day', after the old English name for going or walking.^[8] This was also a feature of the original Roman festival, when revellers would walk to a grove five miles from the city to perform their rites.^[5]

This page:

<http://fullhomelydivinity.org>

Rogation and Ascension

The week of the Sixth Sunday of Easter is busy with processions and outdoor activities. The week begins with prayers and celebrations that focus on stewardship of creation and culminates in the great (but lately much-neglected) Feast of the Ascension of our Lord into heaven on the fortieth day of the Paschal Feast.

Rogation Days

The Rogation Days, the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Ascension Day, originated in Vienne, France (*not Vienna, Austria*), in 470 after a series of natural disasters had caused much suffering among the people. Archbishop Mamertus proclaimed a fast and ordered that special litanies and prayers be said as the population processed around their fields, asking God's protection and blessing on the crops that were just beginning to sprout. The Latin word *rogare* means "to ask", thus these were "rogation" processions. In an agricultural society, closely connected with the soil and highly vulnerable to the uncertainties of nature, this was an idea that took root quickly, and the custom spread around Europe and over to Britain. The Sunday before the Rogation Days came to be considered a part of Rogationtide (or "Rogantide") and was known as Rogation Sunday. The Gospel formerly appointed for that day was from John 16, where Jesus tells his disciples to *ask, and ye shall receive*. While technically they were days of fasting, for which they were also known as "Grass Days," for the meatless meals that were enjoined, the Rogation Days developed into a popular festival, celebrating the arrival of spring and serving other purposes, as well. Other names for these days include "Gang Days," from the Anglo-Saxon *gangen*, "to go," and "Cross Days," both titles signifying the processions with crosses and banners around the countryside. In some parishes,



Beating the bounds in Victorian London

the procession took more than one day and the whole business became an occasion for several days of picnics and revels of all sorts, particularly among those who trooped along at the fringes of the religious aspects of the procession. The route of the walk was around the boundaries of the parish, which was a civil as well as a religious unit. Thus, the processions were useful in teaching people, particularly the young, their parish boundaries. Known as "beating the bounds," the processions customarily stopped at boundary marks and other significant landmarks of the parish, such as a venerable tree, or a great rock, or perhaps a pond. The priest would read the Gospel and perhaps affix a cross to the landmark. Then the boys of the parish would suffer some indignity intended to help them remember the spot. Boys were bumped about against rocks and trees, thrown into the water, held upside-down over fences, thrown into bramble patches, or beaten with willow wands--and then given a treat in compensation. In later times, the marchers beat the boundary marker with the willow wands, beating the bounds, rather than the boys.



Beating the bounds in Lambeth, 1961



Beating the bounds in Claverton, 1999

The reminder of boundaries had another important impact on communal life. In a poem by the 20th century American Robert Frost, the poet's neighbor asserts that "good fences make good neighbors." Boundaries are often very important in relationships. As members of parishes beat the bounds, they would often encounter obstructions and violations of boundaries. The annual beating of the bounds provided an opportunity to resolve boundary issues. It also led to the tradition of seeking reconciliation in personal relationships during Rogationtide. The sharing of a specially brewed ale, called Ganging Beer, and a mysterious pastry, called Rammalation Biscuits, at the end of the walk was a good way of sealing the reconciliation.

George Herbert gave the following good reasons to beat the bounds: 1) *a blessing of God for the fruits of the field*; 2) *Justice in the preservation of the bounds*; 3) *Charitie, in living,*

walking and neighbourly accompanying one another, with reconciling of differences at that time, if they be any; 4) *Mercie*, in relieving the poor by a liberal distribution of largess which at that time is or ought be made.

The custom of placing crosses on boundary markers and in the fields seems to derive from the fact that the Rogation Days fall near the old feast day of the Invention (or *Finding*) of the Cross. Crouchmas ("*Cross-mass*") was on May 3rd and it was the custom on that day to place crosses in fields and gardens as a way of blessing them and praying for them to be fruitful. While full Rogation processions are rare today, the blessing of crosses to be planted in the fields of the faithful is one of the ways the older customs survive.

Keeping the Rogation Days Today

Much of modern society has lost its direct connection with the soil, but this psychological distance does not lessen the actual dependence of all people on the gifts of nature. Furthermore, responsible stewardship of all of these gifts is increasingly being recognized as the concern of all people. Days of thanksgiving, harvest festivals, and the like are observed in many churches at the end of the growing season. The Rogation Days at the time of planting have become little more than a liturgical footnote in the American Prayer Book, but in these times of growing ecological concern the Church would do well to revive them.

Practically speaking, the revival of Rogation observances is likely to involve more people if they are part of a Sunday service. It should be added that, while the Sixth Sunday of Easter is the traditional day, some adaptation to the local season and climate would be appropriate. After all, there is little point in blessing fields and seeds for planting at the time when crops are being harvested in the southern hemisphere. Similarly, there will be many places where farms and rural countryside will not be the locale of processions and blessings. But even in urban churches there should be an awareness of our dependence upon the fruits and resources of the earth, of the ways in which resources are wasted, of the dangers of pollution, and of our responsibility for honest labor and industry.

A Rogation observance in church, then, can be the opportunity for a homily on the Christian stewardship of natural resources. Various symbols can be introduced into the liturgy to reinforce this theme. A procession around the whole parish might not be a possibility, but a procession around the church grounds, a local park, or a parishioner's farm would be appropriate. Parishioners can bring their own garden seeds to be blessed and crosses can be blessed for parishioners to take home and plant in their fields or gardens. Making the crosses would be a good project for the children of the church school or individual families. If the children made Easter gardens, the plants in them can be transplanted to either the parish garden or their family gardens at home, adapting some of the prayers below. Even though the Sunday readings no longer keep the Rogation theme, the hymns can. Hymns and canticles that fit the Rogation theme include, "O Jesus crowned with all renown", "Fairest Lord Jesus", "We plow the fields and scatter", "Now the green blade rises", "O worship the King", *Benedicite, omnia opera*, and Psalm 65.

Here are some elements and prayers for a Rogationtide expansion of the Eucharistic liturgy on Rogation Sunday or any day designated for the observance of Rogation themes:

At the Offertory

Expand upon the usual Offertory of the Eucharist. Seven elements might be presented by members of the congregation and placed upon the Altar:

money - the regular tithes and offerings;

bread - preferably a home-baked loaf ([click here for some recipes](#));

wine - perhaps a bottle of table wine, rather than the usual Eucharistic wine;

soil - a wooden or earthenware bowl of soil;

water - in a clear vessel so that it may be seen;

seed - a bowl of seed, or a basket of various packaged seeds (notice might be given beforehand for people to bring their own garden seed to be blessed either at the Eucharist or at the procession afterwards);

crosses - a basket of small wooden or paper crosses.

When the elements are brought forward, or after they have been presented, sing this hymn to the tune *Lancashire* ("Lead on, O King eternal"):

We pray thee, therefore, Father, to take these gifts of ours

Ourselves, our lives, our labors, our thoughts, our words, our powers;

Though they all be unworthy to place upon Thy board

We know Thou wilt accept them through Jesus Christ our Lord.

As each element is received, an appropriate prayer is said:

At the presentation of money:

Accept, O Lord, our gifts of money, which represent the business of our daily lives: Use them for the work of your Holy Church to carry out your mission; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

At the presentation of bread:

Almighty God our Savior, who in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth labored for daily bread: Accept this bread which is both the fruit of our work and the satisfaction of our needs, and so bless all our industry and necessity; for your sake. *Amen.*

At the presentation of wine:

We offer you, O Lord, this wine, the fruit of the vine: We pray that you will accept it, that it may become for us the Blood of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

At the presentation of soil:

Almighty Creator, we offer to you this soil in token of the fields and forests of our land on which we ask your blessing: We ask that the soil may be wholesome, the crops good, and that we may be faithful stewards of your mercies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

At the presentation of water:

O God, who brought forth life out of the waters of creation: Bless this offering of water and grant that there may be sufficient water to raise up good crops and to serve the needs of our industries; and may we drink of the Living Water to bring forth the fruit of godly living from the soil of our souls; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

At the presentation of seeds:

O Heavenly Father, who by your wondrous providence made all grass, herbs, and trees, each with seed after its own kind: Accept and bless our offering of seed to be planted throughout our parish, that the life in all seed sown may burst forth into fullness of its kind, according to your good creation, and especially the seed of your Word; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

At the presentation of crosses:

O God, whose blessed Son has promised that we need only to ask in order to receive: Accept and bless these crosses, and grant that in the fields where we place them they may stand as a sign of our unfailing trust in your bounty and as encouragement to all who see them to put their faith in your providence; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*



Rogation procession in Bedford, 1952

A Rogation Procession

Either immediately following the Eucharist, or at another convenient time, acolytes with cross, torches, banners, incense, holy water, and other symbols may lead the clergy and parishioners in procession. If no clergy are available, parishioners or families may organize their own procession, delegating or sharing the responsibilities for leading the prayers. During the procession, litanies, psalms, and hymns are sung. The litany may be the Great Litany from *The Book of Common Prayer*, or another litany. A [Litany of the Saints](#) is particularly appropriate on this occasion. The Rogation Days remind us that we are all part of creation and dependent upon both nature and our fellow humans for the necessities of life. Similarly, the Litany of the Saints reminds us that we are also part of something larger spiritually, the Communion of Saints, and dependent upon God's grace and our fellow saints, both living and departed, for spiritual support and sustenance.

The procession stops at various significant places to offer prayer. At each stop a blessed cross may be fixed to a landmark or set in a cultivated field as the Officiant says:

Set up your cross, O Lord, as an ensign to the people, and draw all nations to it. A blessing appropriate to the place is then given. Incense may be offered and the place may be sprinkled with holy water. If a priest or bishop is not present, these prayers may be said by a layperson, adding the words in brackets. The people may also take blessed crosses and holy water to their homes and use these same prayers for the hallowing of gardens and farms that are not visited by the parish procession.

Blessing of Animals

O God, who created all beasts and cattle in a wonderful order and gave them into our care: *[We ask you to]* Bless these animals, that they may be a joy to humankind and sharers in the feeding and nurture of the world. Make us good shepherds of all your creatures, we pray, in the Name of our merciful and Good Shepherd, your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Blessing of Tools

O God, who in your Holy Word has revealed to us your continual love and care both in this life and in the life to come: Guide and direct us in our labors here as stewards of your creation. *[We ask you to]* Bless the tools of our work that by their good use we may bear fruit to your glory and be diligent in our vocations; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Blessing of Seeds

(If seeds were not blessed at the Eucharist or additional seeds have been presented for blessing, the offertory prayer above may be used to bless seeds during the procession.)

Blessing of Gardens

O God, who has given each one of us the opportunity to share in the cultivation of the land: Give us also such skill and patience in digging and sowing and planting that fruit and vegetables and flowers may sustain our bodies and gladden our hearts by their usefulness and beauty. *[We ask you to]* Bless with a healthy and plentiful crop this garden. Endow with skill and endurance those who work here, giving them rich yields and an assured livelihood; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Blessing of Fields and Pastures

O God, who spoke the word and the earth brought forth plants of every kind yielding seed and living creatures of every kind: *[We ask you to]* Bless these pastures and meadows, and all growing grass and green fields; may they remain healthy and unspoiled to the benefit and service of both man and beast. *[We ask you also to]* Bless these fields and all the crops that grow in our countryside; may the soil be wholesome and the crops sound; may the weather be favorable and the workers in good heart. O gracious God, multiply the seed of the sower, the bread of those who eat, and the fruits of righteousness in all your people; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Blessing of Orchards

O God, who commanded that the earth bring forth trees bearing fruit of every kind with the seed in it: *[We ask you to]* Bless this orchard, together with the industrious bees who labor in it and the birds who find food and shelter in it; withhold both the late and the early frost that kills and send, in due season, such moderate rain and gentle sunshine that we may receive the fruits of it to our strength and to your honor; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Blessing of the Parish (given at some central place or from the church door)

O God our Father, whose Son was content to share the life of his village at Nazareth: *[We ask you to]* Bless the life of this parish with your continual presence. Grant that in every home your Name may be hallowed and your will be done, that our people may learn to love every neighbor and live godly lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reconciliation is an important part of the Rogation tradition and should not be overlooked. It is rooted in respect for appropriate boundaries, in the proper ordering of every element of creation, and, most of all, in the forgiveness which Jesus himself extended to those who crucified him. Reconciliation is not just about confession to God and absolution, nor is it merely a formal liturgical rite. Rather, it is about face-to-face reconciliation with our neighbor, and most especially our neighbor within the Church. Thus, one of the stopping points of the Rogation procession should be a place where reconciliation is the theme, with an appropriate reading from Scripture (e.g., 1 John 4:13-21) and a homily calling on everyone in the parish to seek to resolve outstanding differences before the day is over. Whenever possible, the priest and other members of the parish should make concrete efforts to bring together those who need to be reconciled. This prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi may be used:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *Amen.*

It is traditional for the Rogation services and processions to end with food. Ganging Beer was probably just the seasonal brew at the local pub, so for those who want to keep that part of the tradition, any good local brew would serve the purpose well. No one seems to have any idea what Rammalation Biscuits were, so invent your own. [Hot Cross Buns](#) would make a suitable substitute, if you are not feeling creative. In any case, unique foods are not required. Have a picnic or a pot luck supper in the church hall. Gladden the body with good food and drink, and the soul with the fruits of fellowship and reconciliation.