

May 15th, 2020

Dear All,

This week I write to share two upcoming, relatively unusual items in the calendar.

The first is about Pentecost this year: Bp. Andrus has invited the whole Diocese to a special Diocesan-wide service for Pentecost, livestreamed from Grace Cathedral on Sunday morning May 31 at 11am. After consultation with the vestry and the worship committee, we've decided to accept his invitation and join our fellow Episcopalians at Grace for that day. **This means that St. Mark's will NOT offer our own livestream on Pentecost, but will join the rest of the Diocese for this special celebration.** We will send further information on how to connect with that service as we receive it, but we should be able to link to it from our own website and facebook page, just as we've been doing for our own services. We'll still have a Zoom coffee hour afterwards for our own parish, so we can still gather in that way; but church itself will be with our sisters and brothers around the Diocese. I'm grateful to the Bishop for this invitation -- of all days for a Diocesan-wide service, Pentecost is more fitting than most!

Second, this Sunday, May 17, the Sixth Sunday of Easter, is sometimes known as "Rogation Sunday." It has become our custom at St. Mark's to bless the gardens on that day, and we'll continue the custom this Sunday. But I've also been wrestling with some tension about this particular Rogation Sunday: on one hand I delight in blessing God for the beauties of creation; and on the other hand, I'm well aware of our need to pray for deliverance from the dangers of creation, in the form of COVID-19.

This tension has sent me to a little study on the history and roots of Rogation, and I've been pleased to discover that this same tension is also present in older forms of keeping the day. In previous generations, a congregation would go in procession to bless the fields, but in the course of doing so they would also mark the boundaries of the parish; they would chant the whole litany of the saints; they would pray prayers of penitence; they would offer intercessions for "all sorts and conditions" of people; they would pray for fair weather; they would pray for deliverance from bad weather; and they would stop at as many other churches and shrines as were on their route, to sing and pray for those people and their intentions as well. In short, it seems to have been a microcosm of the Church's whole ministry of prayer -- all in anticipation of Christ's Ascension, when the Lord himself takes up his seat in heaven, to make intercession for us all.

Encouraged by this history, we've put together a similar procession for this year: after the Eucharist has concluded, we'll go in procession around St. Marks while singing the litany, stopping at a few important stations, not only to bless the gardens but also to pray for healing from COVID-19, and to pray for all Christians in their vocations wherever they may be. We hope it will be an occasion to feel ourselves part of the larger Church around the world into whose company we have been baptized, as well as to play our small part in the work of "heavy lifting" that prayer is.

Yours faithfully,
Fr. Blake