

Column

“More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of,” wrote Alfred Lord Tennyson, and over the years there have been many dramatic confirmations of this observation.

One came in the early days of the Second World War (before the U.S. had entered the conflict). In May 1940, France had fallen, and the British Army was trapped at Dunkirk. Nothing short of a miracle was needed to bring even a fraction of these stranded men to safety.

In response, King George VI called for a National Day of Prayer. Millions of people flooded into churches throughout the land to pray. A special service was held at Westminster Abbey. The miracle came with thousands of small sea vessels evacuating 335,000 soldiers.

Closer to home, when I was in college, a young ministerial student told me about something equally miraculous that had happened to him. He and his wife were on their way to an out-of-town church where he was to preach one Sunday morning. As it turned out, he either had forgotten or did not have the money to put sufficient gasoline in his car for the journey. So, the family found themselves stranded on the roadside.

So what did he do? He opened the hood and put his hand over the carburetor – those were the days when cars had such things – and prayed. Would you believe the car cranked and they were able to make their way to a filling station? Extraordinary, yes. Impossible, no . . . that is if we believe in a God who set the planets in place and raises the dead.

In my own life, I remember being confronted with a situation that was quite beyond my control. A lady who used her motorized electric chair to go to town was stranded near the church I serve. A motorist took her home, but, at her instructions, called me to deal with recovering her vehicle.

In response, I walked to where the scooter was. There was absolutely no power in the battery, and the contraption was much too heavy to push. I remember ducking my head and saying, “Lord, this one is beyond me. I need help.” No sooner had I lifted my head, a red pickup truck came down the road with a trailer on the back. Together with the driver, whom I knew, we got the cart onto the trailer and back to the woman’s apartment several blocks away. God had provided.

“Ye have not, because ye ask not,” writes James (4:3), and that is so often the case. In ponderous circumstances, we try to bear the full weight on our own shoulders. We fail to look up. We fail to ask.

If a reminder to ask is needed, such a one is provided in the traditional church year of the Christian Church. Rogation – coming from the Latin word meaning “to ask” – begins on the Fifth Sunday after Easter (May 22 in this year’s calendar) and continues on the following Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

The traditional focus of Rogation is agricultural. Prayers are made that the earth may yield her increase, thus allowing the needs of humans to be met. In rural areas, processions with prayers around the ‘bounds of the parish’ were once observed, but not so much today.

Agricultural concerns, however, remain important. At a time when most of our food comes from the grocery store and the connection with what is on our dinner plate and the soil has been lost in the minds of many, we need a reminder. No society can flourish without farmers and wise land practices. More than that, we need to be reminded that it is God who sends the rain and the harvest golden grain. He, and He alone, is the source of our daily bread.

But there is no reason we should focus *solely* on agricultural matters in this season. The God who gives life to the seed of the field and raised Jesus is the Lord of all life. He may even give a boost to your stranded vehicle. Ask and it shall be given to you.

O LORD, from whom all good things do come; Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that are good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Collect, the Fifth Sunday after Easter, from the Book of Common Prayer)

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