

# Rogation Sunday

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Date: 09 May 2021

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this. We're from this morning's epistle lesson in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
- Amen. For the first few years after the resurrection, the church in Judea experienced relative peace. Christians were mostly seen as a loosely organized band of neo-Pharisees who believed that Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth, had risen from the dead.
- The Jewish Christians saw themselves being faithful to the religion of their birth. In Acts, we hear them gathering in the temple daily. We hear of them gathering in the synagogues on Saturday and then separately as a community on Sunday to celebrate the Holy Eucharist.
- They did not believe a new religion had been initiated. They believed Jesus had fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.
- But over time, that changed. As Jews who were more zealous for the law and the Jewish traditions of their fathers started to go after the Christians. We see this in Acts chapter 6 and 7 when St. Stephen the deacon was challenged and then stoned for teaching that Jesus is the Messiah.
- [ 1 : 2 7 ] And then led by the hyper-zealot Saul of Tarsus, who consented to Stephen's death, an attack was launched on the Christians throughout Judea. Acts chapter 8 verse 1 states, And at that time there was great persecution against the church, which was at Jerusalem.
- And they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. We must note again, it was not the Romans who were persecuting the church at this time.
- It was fellow Jews. The epistle of St. James, the first bishop of Jerusalem, is written to those Christians dispersed by that persecution.
- They were his parishioners. It's to those Christians under attack, those persecuted disciples of Jesus, that St. James wrote his epistle.
- The church in this 21st century is on the verge of a situation similar to what those Jewish Christians faced. And like them, this first wave of persecution is not going to come from the secular government, though that will come in time also.
- [ 2 : 4 4 ] The first wave will come from within Christianity so-called. Some are already experiencing it. It will come from the woke Christians, using air quotes, and social gospel Christians.
- It will come from progressive Christians. The first wave of persecution will come from those, paraphrasing 2 Timothy 3, verse 5, that have a form of Christianity, but deny the power thereof.
- My brothers and sisters, the power of Christianity is the cross. It is Jesus Christ crucified, dead, buried, resurrected, and ascended.
- It is Christ now truly and substantially present, body, blood, soul, and divinity, in the Holy Eucharist. It is sacred scripture and sacred tradition.
- When these are denied or downplayed, Christ himself is denied, the essence of the faith is lost, and pseudo-Christianity is the result.

[ 3 : 58 ] God's judgment begins at his house, with his church. We must be ready. We must remain faithful. Our lamps must be trimmed, and our containers filled with oil.

We know not when the bridegroom will come. Throughout this epistle, St. James provides the strategy we as faithful, Orthodox, Anglo-Catholic Christians need to utilize to endure the persecution we are to undergo.

That strategy is summed up in today's epistle when St. James says that we are to live out a religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father.

James tells us there are four components to this religion. First, pure and undefiled religion does what Jesus, in Scripture, teaches.

It lives the word, not just hears it. In St. John, chapter 14, verse 23, Jesus says, If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode, we will make our home with him.

[ 5 : 20 ] If we merely hear the word with our outward ears, but do not keep it, if we do not live it out in our daily lives, our religion is just, well, religion.

It will not be pure and undefiled before God and the Father. Second, pure and undefiled religion looks into and then continues in the perfect law of liberty.

This law is not the law of Moses, but the law of Christ. The law of liberty is what St. Paul speaks of in Galatians, chapter 5, verse 1, where he says, Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty for which Christ has made you free.

The law of liberty doesn't demand we do this or don't do that just because Scripture says so. It's not biblicism. No. It calls us to be faithful in and be faithful to the one whom Scripture reveals.

We believe and do what Scripture teaches because they reveal Jesus Christ, the Savior, to us. Our doing and not doing is an act of love for Christ.

[ 6 : 40 ] 2 Corinthians, chapter 3, verses 5 and 6 states, Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit.

for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. The law of liberty allows us to live joyfully reckless for Christ.

It allows us to take risks with our talents. It is not juridical, but life-giving. It is the life of Christ placed into us at holy baptism, lived out daily to the glory of God.

Third, pure and undefiled religion cares for the poor and the outcast. It meets people where they are and brings them to where they need to be in Christ.

We must remember that in St. Matthew, chapter 25, verses 34 through 46, Jesus says that what we do unto the least of our brethren matters.

[ 8 : 03 ] How we care for those the Holy Spirit places into our path demonstrates the genuineness of our salvation. The same passage tells us that at the judgment, Jesus will divide the world into two groups.

The goats that reject him will be placed on his left. The sheep that believe and are faithful will be placed on his right. And, there will not be a third group, a middle group, I don't know, donkeys and elephants, let's say, who went to church faithfully, had good values, and supported good causes, but did little else.

There is no middle in Christ. Jesus told the church at Laodicea, he will spew the lukewarm out of his mouth. Pure and undefiled religion is never lukewarm.

Lastly, St. James says that pure and undefiled religion keeps itself unspotted from the world. This may be the most challenging component because we live in this world.

Pure and undefiled religion, though, it keeps itself untangled from the zeitgeist, the spirit of the age. It uses the mind of Christ, which is detailed for us in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, to be wise and discern truth from error.

[ 9 : 34 ] It knows the voice of the Good Shepherd and steers clear both of wolves and wolves in sheep's clothing. Instead of taking the wide road that many take, but that leads to destruction, it takes the narrow way, the way, the truth, and the life.

My brothers and sisters, I don't want you to leave here this morning with a feeling of fear about the persecution that is starting and I believe increasingly is to come. As those who are in Christ, we have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

And using sound minds, we simply need to see and discern the signs of the times. The storm clouds are gathering just as Jesus warned they would.

Our choices are clear. We can succumb to the storm. We can try to run and hide from the storm. or we can prepare, stand true, and remain faithful in the midst of the storm.

This final choice is the one Jesus calls us to make. In St. Matthew chapter 10 verse 22 Jesus says, And you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.

[ 11 : 04 ] But he that endures to the end shall be saved. To endure to the end, we must do as those scattered Christians under St. James pastoral care did.

We must live out pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father. In the name of the Father, in the name of the Father, in the name of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.