

Abundant love and joy



God of abundant excess and joy, you are our mother who brings us to birth and gives us our task of loving all the rest of your children. Give us strength for such a task and the joy in fulfilling it and finding fulfilment in it. Amen.

Fruits of the Spirit

– a meditation on Galatians 5:22-23

The pomegranate represents joy

by Caroline Hodgson

With its abundance of seeds, the pomegranate has long been a symbol of bounty and fertility, particularly in the Jewish tradition. As such it has a natural association with joy. In the Song of Songs the rapturous bridegroom compares his bride's cheeks to the halves of a pomegranate. Some Renaissance artists – Botticelli and Raphael among them – painted the Madonna and Child with a pomegranate prominently displayed, while many Italian

Renaissance fabrics have pomegranate patterns woven into them.

Meister Eckhart said: "To rejoice at another person's joy is like being in heaven." If we're feeling low on joy, an unselfish act is a guaranteed booster. It might be an act of giving, or taking more time to listen closely to what someone is saying. But it must be unconditional. If we expect or hope for anything in return for our kindness – even if it's just thanks, recognition or acknowledgement – we run the risk of ending up feeling hurt. But if we practise unconditional generosity our joy levels increase. ☺

Jeni Parsons *reflects on* 1 John 5:1-6

As if being born isn't hard enough, the New Testament reading today suggests we have to be born of God as well as our mother. That double-birth puzzle will come up again in a few weeks and we can leave it until then, but today's reading has momentous consequences for the Christian community because it says that if you love the parent, that is, God, then you will love the child, that is, all who are born of God.

Now I don't know about you, but loving everyone who says they love God is pretty tough going. Loving

God is the easy bit, because God is lovable much of the time, but loving people... that's hard. It also suggests to me, at least, that I can't make a distinction between those who love God in church and those who love God in chapel. Maybe we could take this further and say that I can't make the distinction between those who love God in a synagogue or mosque and those who love God on the hillside or anywhere else. Suddenly this love business is getting out of hand!

How typical of the God we know through Jesus to get out of hand – the God who gives abundantly, loves enthusiastically, accepts unconditionally, so that we might slowly begin to live in that inclusive, joyful way. ☺

Rogation Days

by Lisa Tulfer

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday this week, the three days before Ascension Day, are Rogation Days. Lisa Tulfer looks at their origins.

"Rogation" comes from the Latin *rogare*, to ask. According to one theory, they originated in fifth-century France, when the Bishop of Vienne called three days of fasting and prayer for deliverance from a spate of earthquakes and storms.

By the eighth century it was part of the Christian calendar, and since then Rogationtide has been observed by processions around the perimeter of the parish ("beating the bounds" – literally, hitting the boundary marker stones with sticks), with prayers for the fields, good weather, and plentiful crops. In more urban parishes there are sometimes prayers for local shops, businesses and schools. Following a decline since the eighteenth century, "beating the bounds" has seen a revival in popularity in recent years, although nowadays processions and parish walks are often held on the Sunday before Ascension. ☺

“To rejoice at another person's joy is like being in heaven.”

Meister Eckhart (c.1260-1328),
German theologian, philosopher and mystic