



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent

(Book of Common Prayer)

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Blessed Lord” (which is complemented by “blessed hope” towards the end of this prayer) is a form of addressing God which is unique in the Prayer Book collects. An Advent collect in the eighth century Gelasian Sacramentary starts similarly, so this prayer could have been inspired by that one.

However, this collect is in substance a new composition of Cranmer’s for the original Prayer Book of 1549. It reflects the Reformers’ stress on the centrality of the Scriptures for faith, and its theme and wording have been inspired by Romans 14:4-13 (which is the Prayer Book Epistle for this day). The opening verse of that passage reads, *“Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we through patience, and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope”*.

As well as using the words “patience”, “comfort” and “hope”, the collect also quotes Paul’s phrase that the Scriptures were “written for our learning”. But the collect goes on to explore how that learning may be achieved, very deeply, in a memorable phrase. That phrase provides the heart of the prayer: we ask God to grant that we may, in the right way, “hear ... read, mark, learn and inwardly digest (the Scriptures)”. Those five verbs have a cumulative effect, four monosyllables building up to the final, longer phrase, “inwardly digest them”. They make me think of a firework display of five rockets, sent up in rapid succession, with four ‘pops’ followed by the fifth, a big ‘bang’ accompanied by a shower of golden sparks.

With each of the five verbs the encouragement to be immersed in the Scriptures is intensified. And there is a huge hint in the concluding words “inwardly digest” that to meet Christ in the Scriptures is as important as to meet him in Holy Communion. We inwardly digest the bread and wine of Communion: we are also invited figuratively to inwardly digest the Scriptures, their themes – mercy, grace, judgment, reconciliation and hope among them – shaping our lives more and more.

James Graham December 2025