



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the First Sunday after Epiphany (Book of Common Prayer)

O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This collect is another translation (and adaption) for the first Prayer Book in English (1549) of the Sarum Missal's Latin collect for the same day, subsequently incorporated into the Book of Common Prayer 1662 unaltered.

The English Reformers tended to retain the Latin collects (translated) unless the content clashed with their theology. For example, the Latin collects for Saints' days were replaced or reworked because their theme of the intercession of Saints was unacceptable to the Reformers. Some of the Latin collects also needed adjusting to conform to Reformation doctrine, in particular to reflect that we should rely on God's grace, not on our own worthy deeds.

We may note, then, that the Prayer Book of 1549, despite constituting a radical change principally because of its being in English, showed signs of a cautious conservatism. Its handling of the collects is evidence of this. On reflection, it may even seem a little surprising that collects were retained at all. It is, however, likely that Cranmer was influenced by revised orders for worship in Germany. Whilst a Cambridge don, he had travelled in 1532 to Nuremberg with Sir Thomas Elyot, the English ambassador to the emperor Charles V. There he met the Reformer Andreas Osiander who had helped draw up a revised liturgy for Nuremberg, which was issued in 1533. (Cranmer also married Osiander's niece Margaret.) That order kept collects, but treated them radically. But during this time in Germany Cranmer would also have become acquainted with the German Mass of 1526, drawn up by Martin Luther (1483-1546). Luther, who was liturgically conservative, had translated Latin collects for Sundays, feasts and festivals into German, and he had followed the Latin texts closely. This precedent may well have influenced Cranmer.

This prayer for the First Sunday after the Epiphany has the characteristic pairings of words with which the Reformers frequently enhanced the underlying Latin collect: "perceive and know" and "grace and power".

The collect contrasts *recognising* what we should do and actually *doing* the right things: it is one thing to realise that our faith points in certain directions, and quite another to ensure our faith is translated into action. It is our loving actions which we reveal who we are and whose grace we rely upon: “*Ye shall know them by their fruits*” (Matthew 7:16a).

James Graham, January 2026