



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

A Collect for Good Friday (*Book of Common Prayer*)

Almighty God, we beseech thee graciously to behold this thy family, for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and given up into the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross, who now liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The 1549 Prayer Book required this collect to be used at Mattins on Good Friday, and two others were provided for Holy Communion. This prayer, though, does not conform to the collect's established structure. It is an exception. The prayer's unexpected shape is explained by its origin. It was not a collect, but a blessing, in the Sarum Missal, said over the people ("thy family") at the end of Mass on the Wednesday of Holy Week. The source prior to Sarum was the Gregorian Sacramentary. The Reformers must have been struck by this blessing in order to have translated it for the 1549 Prayer Book, making it a collect for Good Friday. It was probably the prayer's very explicit and succinct reference to the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus that made the Reformers consider that this was a good choice for this day.

I do not think we should be led by this prayer to consider the fate of Jesus as the sole responsibility of "wicked men". Instead, we are to acknowledge the frailty and sinfulness of human nature in which we all participate. Despite our weakness and tendency to sin, Jesus suffered "death upon the cross"; and our recognition of that, and our following Christ as our suffering Saviour, has drawn us back to God, making us his "family".

The simplicity of this prayer prompts the thought that collects are good models for praying. They help give shape to our petitions, desires, fears and gratitude to God, especially at times when our own ability to voice our concerns has deserted us. And they are relatively easy to memorise. Their shape and form meant that they became embedded in the life of the church as a tool of catechism.

The custom of learning collects lasted throughout the nineteenth century, and it continued into the twentieth; in an early period of my own life, I was from time to time required to learn the Sunday collect. In 1874, Thomas Hardy described the heroine of *"Far from the Madding Crowd"* hearing a small boy reciting the collect for the week on the way home, as she stood concealed behind some bushes. Learning the language of the church, God's family, reinforces the experience of belonging to that family – a family created by Christ's death and resurrection.

James Graham

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