



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the First Sunday after Easter

(Book of Common Prayer)

Almighty Father, who hast given thine only Son to die for our sins, and to rise again for our justification: Grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may always serve thee in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This collect was composed for the 1549 Prayer Book. Common Worship also uses this collect (in modern English) on this Sunday; but in Common Worship's treatment of the liturgical year today is "the *second* Sunday of Easter", as opposed to the Book of Common Prayer's "the *first* Sunday after Easter". A bit confusing. Since Easter lasts for fifty days (ending with Whit Sunday, or Pentecost), Common Worship has a point.

In the invocation, the Cranmerian Reformers break away from the tradition of the Latin collects in this composition. Instead of 'O God' or 'Almighty God', translating the underlying almost invariable invocation of the older Latin collects, the prayer opens with "Almighty Father", an opening unique among the collects. Was Cranmer here reflecting a feature of Lutheran collects? Luther in the German Mass of 1526 preferred addressing God as "Dear Lord God" ("Lieber Herr Gott"). That German invocation expressed the intimate relationship with the heavenly Father that Luther preferred to the more formal relationship indicated by the abstract attributes of God in the Latin collects. Perhaps Cranmer also sensed that the collects sometimes seem to portray us as the underlings of a majestic king rather than as God's children, drawn back to him through Christ. Whether or not Cranmer and his colleagues wanted to strike a more intimate note in this collect, the reference to God's Fatherhood is refreshing.

This is very much a Reformation prayer, in that it draws on Scripture and highlights the themes of justification and of sin, both areas of debate then and since. The collect reflects portions of St Paul's letters: Romans 4:25, "*(Jesus) was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification*"; and 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8, "*Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven ... therefore let us keep the feast not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*".

In the latter quotation, Paul was addressing the fact that a few people in the Corinthian church were behaving very badly indeed (see 1 Corinthians 5:1). They were the little leaven, ruining the whole loaf. They needed purging. But this collect does not require us to point the finger at others, but instead to “put away the leaven of malice and wickedness” from within us. Our aim in the prayer is to live lives of pureness – pureness of attitude and purpose – and to serve truthfulness. Such lives honour our heavenly Father.

James Graham
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