



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for Easter Day (Book of Common Prayer)

Almighty God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: We humbly beseech thee that, as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

This is a free expansion in English in 1549 of the Latin Sarum Collect for Easter Day (eleventh century) which itself was a modification of an ancient prayer (eighth century at least). We might have expected on Easter Day, the greatest day in the church's year, a more fulsome reference to the resurrection in this prayer, a mention perhaps of the empty tomb. And we might have expected a strong undercurrent of joy in the prayer, a sense of Jesus's triumph over the cross, the equivalent of a heart-felt "Alleluia!". However, we find the great theme of Easter Day only referred to in the second section of the collect, after the opening address to "Almighty God". This is the clause which describes an action of God; he is the one "who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life". This is the basis of the prayer, and it gives rise to the petition or heart of the collect.

Again and again the collects speak of and pray for God's grace, a vital Biblical and theological theme, and it is very significant that grace has a key place in this Easter Day prayer. "Grace" in the language of the Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion, is the "*favour and goodness*" of God towards us; and that favour flows supremely from God's self-giving as expressed in the work, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. God's grace comes to us as a gift because of and through Jesus. And grace is "preventing": that is, it comes first, it goes before us, it has priority over our own response or reaction to God's love. It is also God's "continual help", not just a one-off gift. Through the Holy Spirit's prompting, we respond to God's love – and the prompting and responding carry on throughout our lives.

As, through grace, we respond afresh to the risen Jesus, our imaginations and minds and wills are fired up. It is uplifting to be reminded that God has the last word, and it is a word of hope, new beginnings, new life, refreshed faith, and sheer love. The resurrection good news that faith, hope and love are triumphant should - we ask in this prayer - change our lives, that they may be transformed into lives of loving action. The collect may not shout "Alleluia!" But our hearts do. And our lives, through God's grace, are to be one long Alleluia.

James Graham

April 2026