



## *St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd*

### The Collect for the First Sunday after Trinity Sunday

*(Book of Common Prayer)*

**O God, the strength of all them that put their trust in thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace, that in keeping of thy commandments we may please thee both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

In the church's year, we are now in 'ordinary time' - that is, a part of the church's year which is outside the seasons of Advent through to Epiphany and of Lent through to Pentecost. Within this period we have "the Sundays after Trinity", a traditional description that in England grew from the eleventh century. Whereas Cranmer began the liturgical year with new collects for Advent 1 and Advent 2, he was content to translate and adapt from the Latin Sarum Missal all the collects for the Sundays after Trinity. It seems possible that either time or enthusiasm for new composition ran out.

For the fourth Sunday in a row this collect is the same (slightly adapted) for Common Worship. It has travelled to us via the Gelasian Sacramentary, the Sarum Missal and the 1549 Prayer Book. In the prayer God's "strength" is contrasted with our human "weakness"; and our human inability to do any "good thing" without God's help is balanced by the requirement that we should be "keeping (God's) commandments". We acknowledge in the prayer our need for God's grace in order to please him "in will and deed": this is a coupling of words typical in English collects, the monosyllables (translating longer Latin words) providing a neat, punchy conclusion to the prayer.

The clause "through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee" is reminiscent of the words St Paul uses in Romans 7:13-20 to weigh up his human nature. The thoughts expressed in that passage of Scripture appear to have inspired the theme of this collect. The anguished Paul in verse 15 writes "*I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate*". And in verse 18 he adds, "*For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it*". Paul is wrestling with the paradox of human nature: even when we desire what is right, we can spoil everything. There seems to be a fault line within us, both as individuals and collectively.

The prayer, however, reminds us that this flaw, this “weakness”, is addressed by God’s “strength” and the grace that flows because of Christ who shared our human life and death. Paul grasped this, and preached Christ as the key to our deliverance. He resoundingly expressed his own gratitude in words we can echo: *“Thanks be to God through Christ our Lord!”* (Romans 7:25a).

*James Graham*

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