



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for Trinity Sunday

(Book of Common Prayer)

Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us thy servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: We beseech thee, that thou wouldst keep us stedfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities, who livest and reignest, one God, world without end. Amen.

Before Pope John XXII formally approved the celebration of Trinity Sunday in 1334, this Sunday concluded the octave of Pentecost. This prayer was appointed the collect for today by the Sarum Missal, but it is much older than that Missal, reaching us via the eighth century Gregorian Sacramentary. The phrase “evermore defend us from all adversities” could hint that this prayer has its roots in early disputes about the doctrine of the Trinity.

1549 saw the prayer’s transition into English for the first Prayer Book. The Reformers had some help here. Between 1529 and 1545 Primers, books of prayers in English designed for private devotion, were printed, and some of those prayers were translations of Sarum collects. The Latin original of this prayer was one such. Two other examples of Sarum collects being translated into the vernacular for Primers are the ones that underlie that last two Sundays, Whit Sunday and the Sunday after Ascension Day. Cranmer and the Reformers clearly knew and used these Primer prayers, but improved upon them.

The word “grace” in the address is a Cranmerian insertion with no equivalent in the Latin. The collect was also slightly adjusted in the revision for the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, the petition in the 1549 version being “*we beseech thee, that through the stedfastness of this faith, we may evermore be defended from all adversity*”. As last week and the week before, this collect is also appointed for today in Common Worship (adapted into modern English).

You cannot encapsulate the subtlety and mystery of the Trinity in a short prayer, and this collect does not try to do that. It simply outlines the doctrine in a rather stark way, and underlines that it is a faith given to us by grace, and prays that God “wouldst keep us stedfast” in it.

The wording of the collect makes it clear that this faith is granted to us collectively. This means that whenever we are so troubled by something that we cannot pray or express our faith we can still ‘borrow’, or tap into, the Church’s faith to see us through. Relying on the Church’s faith like this is one way in which God will “defend us from all adversities”.

James Graham

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