



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity

(Book of Common Prayer)

O God, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal; Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. Amen.

By the time Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day 800 he ruled most of western Europe. Some years before, seeking ways to unify his peoples, he intensified his policy of establishing one rite of the Mass, the Roman Rite, throughout his lands. He wrote to Pope Adrian I requesting a definitive copy of it, a manuscript which could be reproduced as the standard for this purpose. Adrian sent him the Gregorian Sacramentary, so called because it is attributed to Pope Gregory I (590-604). Today's collect was appointed in that Sacramentary for the equivalent of Trinity 4 (that is, the fourth Sunday after the Pentecost octave); then in the later Sarum Rite too; then, translated from Latin into English, in the 1549 Prayer Book, before reaching the 1662 Prayer Book. Common Worship also appoints it (adapted) for today. In keeping with the Reformation emphasis on faith, in 1549 the underlying Latin word meaning 'hope' was rendered "trust".

This collect's translation into English joins others such as Whit Sunday and Trinity Sunday to form a handful of collects which were affected by a prior translation from Latin to be found in one of the English Primers. The Primer in this case had (in modern spelling) "*through thy governance and guiding*", weak-sounding participles which the Prayer Book of 1549 replaced with strong nouns: "*thou being our ruler and guide*".

The prayer contains a typical series of coupled words or phrases: "nothing is strong, nothing is holy"; "increase and multiply"; "ruler and guide"; "things temporal...things eternal". This last pair, which constitutes the climax of this prayer, echoes a theme in 2 Corinthians 4:13-18. In verse 18 St Paul writes, "*We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*"

“Temporal” in this verse and in the collect means transient, so that the contrast between things temporal and things eternal is that between those things which will come to an end as opposed to those which last for ever. The former refers to our earthly lives. We navigate them with all their blessings, delights, discoveries, temptations, and hardships. Because of the very varied nature and possibilities of our lives, this collect acknowledges that we need God as “ruler and guide”, the one ultimately in authority, who will lead us in the right direction through the life and teaching of Jesus and the inspiration and conscience-pricking of the Holy Spirit. Relying on the mercy of such a ruler and guide will help ensure that we “lose not the things eternal”.

James Graham

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