



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity

(Book of Common Prayer)

Grant, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The collect, in its Latin form, was appointed for this same Sunday in the pre-Reformation Sarum Mass before it was translated into English for the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. The earliest appearance of the prayer is in the Leonine Sacramentary, whose original date could be sixth century but possibly containing material from a couple of hundred years earlier.

In all those early centuries, as the western Roman Empire disintegrated, the world was far from “peaceably ordered”. There were incursions of Germanic and other peoples, such as the Goths, Vandals and Huns. There was also the sixth century campaign by the Byzantines, fulfilling the wish of the emperor Justinian (who reigned from 527 to 565) to re-establish control over Italy; the success of that laid an exhausted and ravaged Italy open to a further incursion, this time by the Lombards. Warfare and invasion were not the only tribulations: famine, plague and want were endemic.

In such circumstances the church provided a vital refuge. In it people found the law and order, the peace and security, which had apparently fled from the secular world. In the church they found blessings which were not subject to the vagaries of human fortune; they were instead founded on the eternal truths of life in the Spirit. The gateway to this spiritual world was the worship of the church, in which people found a momentary realisation of spiritual truth which freed them from the drab limitations of their earthly lives.

No wonder disturbance that would shake the haven of the church was dreaded. Though this collect in English asks that the joyful service of the Church may be the result of the “peaceable” (that is, peaceful) ordering of the world by God’s governance, in the original Latin prayer both the peaceful ordering of the world and the calm devotion of the church are asked for in parallel. Those early centuries witnessed many strains in the western church as well as in the Roman world generally.

A principal strain occurred because the in-coming peoples followed a version of Christianity, Arianism, which had been condemned as heresy. The historical background of the collect reveals a longing that the church should not be disturbed either by inner turmoil or by an unpredictable world – a church which is therefore able to “serve thee in all godly quietness”.

We still long for a peaceful world today; and we also need the worship of the church as a haven from which we may emerge strengthened by word and sacrament in order to “joyfully serve” God in our daily lives.

James Graham

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