



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity

(Book of Common Prayer)

O God, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Appointed for this Sunday by the Sarum Mass, this collect's oldest appearance, in Latin, is in the eighth century Merovingian collection of liturgical material referred to as the Gelasian Sacramentary. It is likely that the contents of this sacramentary are much older. Cranmer's first Prayer Book (1549) saw the prayer translated into English. Common Worship also authorises this collect for this Sunday, adapted into in modern English.

There is some history behind the wording "above all things". The original Latin collect asks that we may love God "*in all things and above all things*". The 1549 version only refers to "*in all things*", while the 1662 Prayer Book changed that to "above all things". The Common Worship version re-instates the full phrase: "*...pour into our heart such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire...*" This fuller phrase affects the balance of the prayer; but I like the thought of showing the love of God in every situation in which we find ourselves.

In the Latin prayer the words lying behind "above all" and "exceed all" have the same root. The two expressions still balance and echo each other well in English even though they do not derive from the same root word.

The underlying inspiration of this collect is 1 Corinthians 2:9, where St Paul writes: "*But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*". Paul, well versed in the Hebrew Scriptures, is quoting Isaiah 64:4: "*For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him*". However, Paul makes subtle but important changes in his quotation, in particular he replaces Isaiah's "*waiteth for him*" with "*love him*".

This portrays the role of those who long for God as one of active service prompted by loving God, as opposed to one of comparative passivity which the idea of waiting can imply.

The collect is immersed in the theme of love, reflected in its sequence of “love”, “love”, “loving”. The source of this love which transforms our lives into ones of active commitment to God is God himself. “Pour it into our hearts” we pray.

James Graham
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