



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

(Book of Common Prayer)

O God, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This originally Latin prayer has travelled to us from the Gelasian Sacramentary and the Sarum Missal (where it was also appointed for this same Sunday). A literal translation into English for the 1549 Prayer Book rendered the petition, *"Give unto us abundantly thy grace that we running to thy promises may be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure"*. This was expanded into its current form in 1662, and in modern English this collect is also appointed for this Sunday in Common Worship. In one form or another, therefore, this is another example of a collect that has served us on this same Sunday for hundreds of years.

The collect's preamble strikingly states that the supreme demonstration of God's power is shown, not in creation and providence, but in his redemptive love and mercy. "Mercy" relates to the way God spares us; and "pity" means his compassion.

Asking for "such a measure of (God's) grace" makes it clear that we are not striving to gain rewards through our own merit, or relying on our own success in "running the way of thy commandments". Instead, we are looking to God's inspiring and supporting grace.

"Running the way of thy commandments" requires grace-inspired persistence. St Paul knew the cost of effort and persistence, and encouraged it in the churches he founded, famously egging on the Christian in Corinth with the words, *"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain"* (1 Corinthians 9:24). And Paul was concerned that the Christians in Galatia had gone off the rails in the way they were expressing their faith: *"Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?"*

The “prize” Paul mentions equates to the “heavenly treasure” of the collect. And “heavenly treasure” makes me think of Jesus’s parable in Matthew 13:44, where the Kingdom of Heaven is described as the joy of discovering a great treasure, a treasure worth cashing in everything else to gain: *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field”*. To obtain that treasure we need God’s merciful grace to inspire our effort in running the race of faith.

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