



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity

(Book of Common Prayer)

Grant to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

These neat and succinct prayers which we call collects have reached us through different historical developments. From at least the time of Pope Leo I (440-461) the collect was one of a small group of prayers (*orationes*) said at key moments in the Roman Mass. What we now call the collect came first, concluding the entry or opening rite, preceding and also heralding the Scriptural readings, a place it still holds in our Communion service. It was in the Gregorian Sacramentary that these prayers were referred to as *ad collectam*, a term derived from the Gallican rite's *collectio* (later *collecta*). These terms may mean that the prayer was said on behalf of those 'collected' for worship, or else that it was a prayer which summed up ('collected') preceding silent prayers or a series of litany-style prayers. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive.

This originally Latin collect has reached us via the oldest of the Sacramentaries, the Leonine, and the Sarum Mass. It was translated into English for the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. It was, though, significantly altered for the 1662 Prayer Book. Instead of "we, who cannot do anything that is good without thee", 1549 had wording which accorded more closely with the underlying Latin: "*we, who cannot be without thee*". 1549 also had "*able*" instead of "*enabled*"; the latter is surely an improvement, though a literal translation of the Latin would be "*that we...may be powerful to live according to thy will*".

The collects are speckled with allusions to Scripture and the Apocrypha, and this one reflects that. The verbs in the petition of the collect, "think" and "do", echo the injunctions used by St Paul in Philippians 4:8-9. He asks the recipients of his letter to think about whatever is true; and then to do "*those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me*".

In the context of Paul's writing and of this collect, thinking includes praying, pondering Scripture, and reflecting. And doing indicates practical action and engagement with the busy world's demands. Stopping to ponder as opposed to being busy is explored in the story of Mary and her sister Martha in Luke 10:38-42. Mary sat and listened to Jesus, whilst Martha was busy about the necessary household chores. Though Jesus said that Mary had chosen the better way, there is a subtle interplay between the two ways in the Christian life. "Thinking", which involves praying and contemplating, forms us; whilst "doing" contributes to the needs of the world and of our neighbour – and provides us with experiences which feed back into our praying and contemplating.

James Graham

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