



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

(Book of Common Prayer)

Lord, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This collect in its Latin form is but nineteen words long. It appears in the Gregorian Sacramentary among a group of prayers for morning or evening, and it is appointed as the collect for today in the Sarum Missal.

This English version, made for the 1549 Prayer Book, is also very short and direct, though the original prayed that we might be given to "*good works*" whilst 1549 ratchets up the petition to include "all" good works. Asking for a life dedicated to "all good works" seems a tall order; but from the point of view of the collect's construction, the insertion of the word "all" makes the conclusion of the petition a trio of monosyllables. This provides a memorable ending, three short drum-like beats.

Though the modern meaning of "prevent" is avoid or hinder, here it has its older or former meaning, to precede, or to go before. The prayer is therefore for grace which clears the way for our right actions and then which accompanies us and supports us in our lives of faith. These two operations of grace have been called prevenient and co-operating grace. God prepares the way for us to respond in each situation with the right attitude and right actions; and then, as we co-operate with his purposes, we find we are in a position to be shaped by his grace more and more. In this way of describing God's grace there is a whole-hearted acknowledgement of our complete reliance on God coupled with encouragement that we should co-operate with his loving purposes.

It was fortuitous that so many of the Sarum Latin collects, the collect set for today included, evoke God's grace. The theme of grace suited the Reformation mindset of Cranmer and his colleagues. They were keenly interested to ensure that these prayers aligned with their interpretation of justification, of the priority of grace, and of salvation by faith alone.

Reflecting on the operation of God's grace, and on the phrasing of this collect, Psalm 23 came to mind. God goes before us, 'prevents us': *"He shall feed me in a green pasture, and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort"* (verse 2). And God also supports us, 'follows' us: *"But thy loving kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life"* (verse 6a).

This collect invites us to be alert to the opportunities God gives us to live life fully and well, relying solely on his gracious loving-kindness, which will "make us continually given to all good works".

James Graham

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