

St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

(Book of Common Prayer)

O Lord, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This collect is a 1549 translation of the Latin collect for this day in the Sarum Missal, which in turn derived it from the Gelasian Sacramentary. There is a play on words in the original prayer, and also the use of alliteration. The word-play could not be replicated in English, but instead we get rhythms established by "cleanse and defend", "help and goodness", and "safety….succour". But we still get alliteration in the English prayer through "safety…succour", mirroring the alliteration in the Latin prayer which also happens to depend on the letter 's'.

This is another prayer for the Church. We had one last week, Trinity 15, when we considered such prayers for the Church may well have been exceptionally meaningful for Cranmer and his colleagues at a time when the Church in the west of Europe was undergoing the upheaval we call the Reformation. Today's collect, though, did not use the word Church in the collect of 1549: "congregation" was used instead, "Church" replacing it in a revision for the 1662 Book for Common Prayer. Why congregation? William Tyndale translated the New Testament and a large part of the Old from the underlying original languages. He made a series of revisions of the New Testament, and his version of 1534 is recognisable because it was drawn upon so heavily for the King James Version of the Bible (1603). Tyndale used "congregation", and not "church", as in Matthew 16 where Simon Peter recognises Jesus as the Christ, Jesus answering him "*happy art thou Simon the Son of Jonas … I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter: and upon this rock I will build my congregation"* (verses 17a & 18a). Tyndale was translating the word 'ecclesia' which derives from the verb meaning 'to call out' or 'gather together', and in ancient Greece the word referred to a gathering of citizens to discuss various concerns. Congregation thus appears to be a valid translation of ecclesia.

However, the Church developed into a wide body of Christians bound together by the Scriptures, creeds and sacraments. We see the beginnings of this understanding of the Church in several places in Paul's writings, including 1 Corinthians 10:17, *"For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread"*.

"Church" came to indicate something so much broader and deeper than the thought of a gathered group of faithful people, and "congregation" therefore came as a radical shock to many. The word may possibly have been used in 1549 simply because 'Church' had been employed in the collect of the previous week - a way of avoiding repetition. Whatever the motive, the history of this collect reminds us that Christians belong to the world-wide Church, the Body of Christ, whilst also being rooted in a local congregation.

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