

St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity

Grant, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This exquisitely short prayer is to be found, in its Latin original form, in the Gelasian Sacramentary. The oldest version of this sacramentary, which contains the priest's texts for celebrating the Eucharist throughout the liturgical year, is an eighth century manuscript which is now in the Vatican library. It is the most important surviving Merovingian illustrated manuscript.

The Sarum Missal appoints this collect for this same Sunday; and the reformers rendered the prayer into English for the Prayer Book of 1549. And it remains the collect for Trinity 21 in Common Worship, adjusted into modern English.

For the 1549 Book some changes to the Sarum collect were made. The most significant alteration was the replacement of an underlying word which meant "favour" with the word "pardon", and this change gives us the alliterative coupling, "pardon and peace".

There are two parallel limbs in the collect. One hinges on the request for pardon, namely the consequence, "that they may be cleansed from all their sins". And the other matches the request for peace, with the sought result "that they may…serve thee with a quite mind". This carefully and beautifully arranged structure of the prayer is a reminder that liturgical compositions must produce the necessary aural effects for public worship: dignity, sonority and balance.

The collect's longing for a quiet mind reflects the pressures of the centuries which were the background to most of these prayers' composition. But the human search for quiet minds continues through each generation. If you were to seek general advice about achieving an undisturbed mind, you may perhaps be guided to take a refreshing break; or to listen to music; or to connect with nature. There is great wisdom in such ideas.

But Christian insight crowns the search for a tranquil spirit: it is the facing up to our falling short of what God designs for us, yet being assured of his continual, forgiving love. It is God's pardon that leads to peace, and being cleansed "from all…sins" that graciously enables us to serve God "with a quiet mind".

James Graham

October 2026