



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity

(Book of Common Prayer)

O God, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee: Mercifully grant, that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This compact collect, which is also retained in Common Worship (2000) in modernised English, has undergone two major transitions before reaching us in this well-used and familiar form. Found in the Gelasian Sacramentary, it was taken up in its Latin version as the collect for this Sunday in the Sarum Missal. It was then rendered into English for the 1549 Prayer Book and then re-structured in the revision for the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

A very literal translation into English would have given us *“Direct our hearts, O Lord, we beseech thee, by the working of thy mercy, for without thee we are not able to please thee”*. The 1549 Prayer Book version read *“O God, forasmuch as without thee, we are not able to please thee: Grant that the working of thy mercy may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord”*. 1549’s reorganisation of the original keeps the balance of the words “without thee” and “please thee” and provides a new pairing in “direct and rule”.

For the 1662 Book, the collect was revised to the present form so that it explicitly prays for the Holy Spirit. Although in this case it was those later revisers who inserted a direct reference to the Spirit, a review of the collects specially composed by Cranmer and his colleagues (as opposed to those they inherited from the Sarum Missal) shows that the English Reformers wanted to ensure that the collects made direct references to the Holy Spirit. A large number of the collects derived from Sarum mention or allude to the working of God’s grace, his love and his mercy; but the Spirit’s part in this is only implicit. This omission of direct reference to the operation of the Holy Spirit in the world comes across as something strange. The Reformers, it appears, wished to correct this omission. They wanted the role of the Holy Spirit to be highlighted and made explicit. Examples of collects composed for the 1549 Prayer Book which bring the Spirit to the fore are the collects for Christmas Day, Quinquagesima and Lent 1. The 1662 version of this collect is evidence that the revisers shared this concern to make the Spirit more evident in our prayers.

Making explicit a plea for the Holy Spirit to shape our lives opens us up to the working of God's grace, and to new and unexpected possibilities in God's service. We rely on the Spirit to "direct and rule our hearts".

James Graham

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