

# St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

## The Collect for the Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Trinity

**Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

This marvellously pithy prayer first appeared in the 1549 Prayer Book, and is a free translation and adaption of the (Latin) collect for the same day in the Sarum Rite. Earlier, it was an Advent collect in the Gregorian Sacramentary. Common Worship retains this collect as a post-communion prayer. The Prayer Book's rubrics state that the provisions for this Sunday, Trinity 25, should always precede Advent Sunday, so this Sunday is usually called the Sunday next before Advent. This collect, and this Sunday, therefore, always herald Advent and the new liturgical year, as well as rounding off the previous worshipping year.

It is to Archbishop Cranmer and his circle that we owe those striking words "Stir up". They are neat, punchy monosyllables that translate the underlying Latin word *excita*. Cranmer has thus communicated the 'excitement' without resorting to a Latinate word which would have sounded ponderous in English.

The Reformers' typical use of English monosyllabic words is pronounced in this prayer: there are 27 of them out of 34 words. As a long word in sea of short ones, the twice-repeated "plenteously" really stands out, and it causes two key phrases of the collect to balance and echo each other. The word evokes the theme of God's harvest (see for example Matthew 9:37: *"The harvest truly is plenteous"*); and it conjures up an image of his abundant generosity, making me think of Luke 6:38, where Jesus says, *"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down and shaken together."*

Is it typical of Anglicans to hear in this prayer something literal about anticipating Christmas? The references to 'fruit' and to stirring up has made people think about stirring the fruity mixture for Christmas pudding. Hence, *"Stir up Sunday"*. But "fruit" in this prayer is of course a figure of speech, one often used in the New Testament. A good example is John 15:1-17, in which Jesus says, "*I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit"* (verse 16a). That fruit is 'good works'; that is, our faith should translate into actions, deeds which make our faith evident and effective. Paul makes it clear that the various fruits of faith are gifts of the Holy Spirit (for example in Galatians 5:22 & 23). This makes it feel as though this prayer were addressed to the Holy Spirit. He is the one who will really stir us up if we but open our wills to him.

The collect picks up the theme of being "rewarded" which is to be found in Scriptural passages such as Matthew 6:1-6 with its repeated phrase *"thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee"*. There is a big debate about rewards in Scripture and whether doing good things with the ulterior purpose of gaining a personal reward is ethical. Perhaps being re-shaped by the Spirit is the essence of the real reward or result of God's love.

As we gradually move into winter we are almost tempted to hibernate. Instead, we could resolve to use Advent as a period to tune into God's will through prayer, and to support our neighbour in practical ways. For such works, 'Stir us up, O Lord!'

*James Graham*

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