



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

(Book of Common Prayer)

O Lord, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

Altered for the 1662 Prayer Book, this collect is a translation and expansion for the 1549 Prayer Book of the Latin collect for this same Sunday in the Sarum Rite; and that Latin collect is also to be found in the eighth century Gelasian Sacramentary. The request that God should “come among us” expresses this collect’s Advent nature: it is another prayer that voices a longing for God to come to us.

This collect contains several pairings characteristic of English collects: “sins and wickedness”; “let and hindered” (“let” here meaning ‘obstructed’); “grace and mercy”; “help and deliver”; “honour and glory”. The first of these pairs occurs in the invitation to confession in the Prayer Book’s Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, and that invitation is a reminder that this way of pairing words and the ideas behind them is a mark of the Prayer Book generally.

I once thought that this was done as English assimilated words from different sources, in particular from Old English and Latin (or French words with Latin origin), using words to provide alternatives to ease understanding. I now think this trait has more to do with the rhetorical nature of this style: the speaker can make the words flow more easily, and the hearer can memorise the various phrases more easily too.

“Satisfaction” is used in the legal sense of paying off a debt; it is one way of exploring the doctrine of the atonement, one voiced in the Prayer Book’s prayer of consecration, where it says of Jesus that he made on the cross “*a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world*”. In the 1549 collect the wording is different: that version prays that “*thy bountiful grace and mercy, through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, may speedily deliver us*”, phrasing which makes it clearer that God’s “grace and mercy” flow through the work of Christ.

The words “in running the race that is set before us” were added in 1662. The 1662 revisers are here drawing on Hebrews 12:1b, *“let us run with patience the race that is set before us”*. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul also uses racing in verse 24 to describe the spiritual struggle. (He uses the metaphor of boxing too, and he really means to land his punches - see verse 26.)

Here is a reminder that our Christian calling requires us to work as hard as we can, through deed and prayer, to fulfil God’s will. No wonder we pray for God’s “bountiful grace and mercy”.

James Graham, December 2025