



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for Sexagesima

(Book of Common Prayer)

O Lord God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do: Mercifully grant that by thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This collect for the second Sunday of the period Betjeman called 'the Gesimas' is a translation for the 1549 Prayer Book of the Sarum Missal's Latin collect for the same day. There has, though, been a major alteration. The Sarum prayer originally asked of God, "*Mercifully grant that by the protection of the teacher of the Gentiles we may be defended against all adversities*". The "*teacher of the Gentiles*" is St Paul, those exact words describing him in 1 Timothy 2:7 and 2 Timothy 1:11. The Reformers, though, disapproved of all prayer to the saints or which invoked the power of the saints, and so "*by thy power*" replaced "*by the protection of the teacher of the Gentiles*".

However, though a direct reference to Paul has been removed there remain in this collect indirect links with Paul and the ideas he explores and expounds in his letters. One link relates to the reference to "*adversity*", which has been brought about by the day's Epistle, 2 Corinthians 11:19-31, appointed by the Sarum Missal and retained by the 1549 Prayer Book. Paul had never actually met Jesus in the flesh like his fellow apostles, and therefore in order to secure his credentials as an apostle he had to verge on boasting about his achievements. In this passage of his epistle Paul highlights all the adversities he has faced in the cause of the Gospel; compared with other ministers of Christ, he writes, "*I am more: in labours more abundant; in stripes above measure; in prisons more frequent; in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often; in perils of waters; in perils of robbers; in perils by mine own countrymen; in perils by the heathen; in perils in the city; in perils in the wilderness; in perils in the sea..*" (verses 23-26).

Another indirect link with the themes of Paul's letters is in the words "*we put not our trust in any thing that we do*". That phrase sounds very negative, but underlying it is the conviction that we should strive to rely on God's grace and not on our own resources. Paul expressed this conviction by contrasting his own weakness with God's strength: "*(The Lord) said unto me, 'my strength is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.'*" (2 Corinthians 12:9a).

In his apparent weakness and facing so many sufferings, Paul had discerned that nevertheless the strength or “power” of God’s love was working in and through him. And he recognised in Jesus the supreme example of that pattern of God’s strength working through apparent weakness; he wrote in his letter to the Philippians “*(Christ) humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him*” (chapter 2, verses 8b-9a.). You cannot be weaker than a corpse on a cross. Yet on that cross the love of God was shown at its strongest.

James Graham, February 2026