



## *St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd*

### The Collect for Quinquagesima (*Book of Common Prayer*)

**O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth: Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee: Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen**

Archbishop Cranmer had a tower built at Lambeth Palace. Located at the north-east of the palace chapel, it housed his study, and was the main place where he prayed, studied and perhaps compiled the Book of Common Prayer of 1549. This collect was composed for that book, probably by him. It is based on the well-known passage written by St Paul, 1 Corinthians 13, which is this Sunday's Prayer Book Epistle. The passage's beauty both in its hymn-like structure and its moving content stood out in such a way that, when chapters were allocated to Scripture in the early thirteenth century, this portion of Paul's letter was given a chapter all to itself. And it may well have been one of Cranmer's predecessors as Archbishop of Canterbury who gave this portion of Paul's letter a chapter in this way, for Stephen Langton (Archbishop 1207-1228) is credited with being the first to provide these numbered divisions. (Verse numbering came later, with printing and the Reformation.)

"Charity" in the collect and in the King James Version of 1 Corinthians 13 means Christian love. It is a gift from God ("thy Holy Ghost" is asked to "pour (it) into our hearts"), and it inclines us to respond to God's grace and generosity shown us in Christ. It is more than a sentiment: it is an act of will. And it is practical love, love-in-action we could say. This is the sort of love we recognise in Jesus's ministry. Jesus can be seen as the personification of love-in-action. Tellingly, this passage of Paul's writing reads well if you substitute 'Christ' for the word 'charity'; verse 7 serves as an example: "(Christ) beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things".

In 1 Corinthians 1:11 Paul explains that a report of quarrels among the Christians in Corinth has reached him. In 1 Corinthians 13, in the face of arguments about who had the better gifts of the Spirit, Paul is explaining that without Christian love to unite the Corinthians everything else was flawed. Paul is trying to re-establish their unity, what he calls the "bond of peace": he writes in Ephesians 4:3 that he is "*endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*".

The love we pray for in this collect, which picks up Paul's expression in "the very bond of peace", is therefore a love which expresses and furthers our unity.

The collect sounds quite extreme at one point: "without (charity) whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee". This conclusion can be inferred from Paul's understanding of charity: "*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing*" (verse 2). To be nothing is to be extinct.

On the brink of Lent, when we are thinking about prayer and self-discipline, it is good to be reminded of the priority of love. Everything is compromised without it. And it is "of all virtues" the best: "*Now abideth faith, hope and love, even these three: but the chief of these is love*" (1 Corinthians 13:13, as translated in the 1520s by William Tyndale, the first to render the original Greek into English).

*James Graham, February 2026*