



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

(Book of Common Prayer)

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Before the Reformation, and before printing, there were many versions of the Mass. There were variations not just in different realms but also within those realms. England was no exception: there were several Mass rites. By the time of the Reformation, the most widespread was the Sarum Rite. This was established in the eleventh century by St Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury; it drew upon the liturgy of the older Sacramentaries. The Sarum Rite had a huge influence on the Book of Common Prayer, including the collects, the English Reformers clearly using it as their starting point.

Today's collect is one of those based on a collect in the Sarum Rite. It translates the Sarum collect for the same day, the fourth Sunday of Lent. This is therefore another example of a prayer which, in one form or another, has been prayed in England on this day in the Church's year for many centuries.

Archbishop Cranmer, together with "*sundry most grave and well-learned prelates*", shaped the Book of Common Prayer of 1549, and this collect first featured in English in that book. 1549 originally said "*who for our evil deeds are worthily punished*" That meant that our deeds are worthy of punishment. For the 1662 Book of Common Prayer this part of the collect was altered to bring out the intended meaning, "*who for our evil deeds worthily deserve to be punished*", a reworking which also improves the prayer's rhythm.

This collect is of a very minimal form; it is a short, direct and beautifully balanced prayer. There is a contrast between "*our evil deeds*" and "*the comfort of thy grace*" ("*comfort*" here meaning strength). And there is a symmetry between "*worthily deserve to be punished*" and "*mercifully be relieved*". This truly is a Lenten prayer, inviting us to ponder the contrast between our failures and God's strengthening grace.

The fourth Sunday in Lent is also known as Mothering Sunday. The name appears to have its origin in a mediæval tradition of people visiting their 'mother' churches on this day, that is the churches where they were baptised, or perhaps the cathedral in their diocese. In due course this Sunday was experienced as a small oasis in this season of abstinence, Refreshment Sunday coming to be another way of referring to it. This collect has no direct connexion with the traditions of Mothering or Refreshment Sunday, but it is fortuitous that its themes of comforting grace and merciful relief suit the notion of a pause in the rigours of Lent very well.

James Graham

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