



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Fifth Sunday after Easter

(Book of Common Prayer)

O Lord, from whom all good things do come: Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is a very short 1549 collect, and if you omit the mediation (the underlying equivalent of “through our Lord Jesus Christ”) it is a mere twenty-one words in the underlying Latin original. The Sarum Missal appoints that original for this same day, Easter 5, and derived it from the eighth century Gelasian Sacramentary. Its brevity is a reminder that collects reflect the concise tradition that shaped Roman rhetoric. The harmonic setting of words, through obtaining the right rhythmic fluctuation of short and long syllables, was highly prized.

This prized pattern of rhetoric influenced the religious traditions of pre-Christian Rome, and there is evidence that the way these devotions were composed formed a precedent verging on a template for the style and form of the Latin collects. Are the Latin collects therefore somehow tainted by these pre-Christian roots? The wisdom of St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) is helpful here; he wrote that all that is true, good, and beautiful rightly belongs to the church of God, regardless of origin.

God’s grace and mercy are implicit in this prayer. He is the one “from whom all good things do come”, and he prompts us to recognise what is good by his “holy inspiration”. His grace then continues to work as he guides us to “perform the same”, so that we bring to fruition by our deeds what we know to be right.

This Sunday is also known as Rogation Sunday, the beginning of Rogationtide. This mini-season, occurring within Eastertide in the days that precede Ascension Day, concentrates prayer on our relationship with and dependency upon the natural world. With origins in the fifth century, it was only adopted by the Roman rite in the reign of Pope Leo III (who died in 816). The Rogation ceremonies are thought to have reached the British Isles in the seventh century. In the late twelfth century the Sarum Missal provided litanies to be sung in processions around parishes, a practice that in post-Reformation times mutated into ‘the beating of the bounds’, a way of affirming parish boundaries in times when shared memory was relied on more than maps.

Rogationtide prayers seek God's goodwill and bounty towards the parish and his protection of crops. This collect is not of this category, but it does set the scene for such prayers, because it serves as a reminder that the God we pray to is the one "from whom all good things do come".

James Graham

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