



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Second Sunday after Easter

(Book of Common Prayer)

Almighty God, who hast given thine only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an ensample of godly life: Give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As was the case last week (Easter 1), this collect was composed for the Prayer Book of 1549. “Ensample” looks like a misprint but is actually an older form of the word ‘example’. But the collect once did contain a misprint; “thine only Son” mistakenly appeared as “*thine holy Son*” in 1549. In the age of printing mistakes could be made by a typesetter, just as in an earlier age monks could make mistakes when copying manuscripts.

This minor error was replicated in the 1552 Book of Common Prayer, the more radical order drawn up by Cranmer and colleagues in the reign of Edward VI. The major changes in 1552 mainly concerned the order for Holy Communion, but the collects were certainly reviewed as well because the 1552 Book made alterations in their spelling, and also included a new collect for St Andrew’s Day. (The 1549 prayer had referred to the manner of St Andrew’s death which is not evidenced in Scripture.) Nevertheless, the small error slipped through. It was still not picked up in the 1559 Elizabethan Book of Common Prayer, which reinstated the liturgy of 1552 (albeit with some changes) after the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary. However, in a 1596 reprint of the Elizabethan book the adjustment to “thine only Son” was made.

The inspiration behind this prayer is the Book of Common Prayer Epistle set for Holy Communion this Sunday, 1 Peter 2:19-25. Verse 19 reads, “*For even hereunto were you called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps*”. The Reformers’ understanding of “*suffered for us*” is revealed in the collect’s use of the wording “a sacrifice for sin”. A “godly life” is a typically Reformation expression, and it means that we should “follow the blessed steps” of Christ, wording that closely echoes 1 Peter 2:19.

In the collect's petition we first pray to respond to the Christ's suffering by receiving the benefit that flows from it, and secondly to strive to take Christ as the example for the way we should live our lives, by following his steps. The two-fold grounds for prayer are therefore neatly balanced by the two-fold request.

"Endeavour" in the prayer is used transitively, so that "daily endeavour ourselves" means that we should strive to follow Christ's example each and every day. Only God's grace can support us in such a response to his "inestimable benefit".

James Graham

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