



## *St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd*

### The Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Easter

*(Book of Common Prayer)*

**Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men: Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

This collect is found in the eighth century Gelasian Sacramentary. The eleventh century Sarum Missal appoints it for this same Sunday. Translated from its original Latin into English for the 1549 Prayer Book, it was altered somewhat for the 1662 Prayer Book. Common Worship also uses it, in modern English, as its collect for the third Sunday before Lent.

Throughout the centuries, the structure of the collect has offered the prospect that the collect might be chanted, a way of performing the liturgical text to enhance audibility and to encourage prayerful listening. It is interesting to note that Luther in his German Mass of 1526 continued the mediæval tradition of chanting the collect by laying down that the priest should chant it in monotone whilst facing the altar. There is no equivalent reference to chanting in the Book of Common Prayer. Nevertheless, singing the Book's liturgy was envisaged. This is evidenced by the work of John Merbecke (c1510-c1585) who composed plainchant for the 1549 Book of Common Prayer as early as 1550. A later example of a composer who wrote music for the Book of Common Prayer is William Byrd (1540-1623), who composed anthems for the collects. The English collects, beautifully and confidently constructed as they are, lend themselves to being sung.

As we often do, we find balanced rhythms and complementary pairings in this collect. One such pairing is "wills and affections". "Affections" here does not mean friendly feelings, as in current English, but refers to dispositions of the mind; the "attitudes", we might say, of human beings are unruly. The petition, the core of the prayer, has two balancing phrases: "love the thing which thou commandest" and "desire that which thou dost promise". The two adjectives in the memorable phrase "the sundry and manifold changes of the world" form another complementary couple of words.

Amid the world's unpredictable flux, and in contrast to it, the collect asks that "our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found". Those "true joys" are reached by loving what God desires of us, and by longing for his gracious promises to be fulfilled. Music and singing can help us express that loving and that longing.

*James Graham*

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