



## *St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd*

### The Collect for The Sunday after Ascension Day

*(Book of Common Prayer)*

**O God the King of glory, who hast exalted thine only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph unto thy kingdom in heaven: We beseech thee, leave us not comfortless, but send to us thine Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ is gone before; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.**

This prayer's equivalent in modern English is also today's Common Worship collect. It is from a unique source, the Sarum Missal antiphon for the Magnificat at Vespers on Ascension Day. This antiphon gained a special significance in England because it was sung by the Venerable Bede at the time of Vespers on Ascension Day in 735, shortly before he died.

The original Latin and the 1549 equivalent reflect the tradition of especially praying for the gift of the Holy Spirit in Ascensiontide, the ten-day period between Ascension Day and Whit Sunday (or Pentecost). It is also traditional in this period to refer to Jesus as the King of glory; the underlying Latin does so, but 1549 changes the address to "God the King of glory", making for an arresting opening.

1549 also extends the antiphon considerably with the addition "and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour is gone before". By this addition a chiasmus has been created, two clauses where one reverses the order in which similar words appear: "exalted"... "comfortless" are succeeded by "comfort us"... "exalt us". Some have considered this rhetorical device to be especially apt for Christian prayers because the structure reflects the symmetry of the first letter of "Christ" in Greek, the letter Chi (X). Other Christian writing may also reflect this pattern. For example, some commentators see in the structure of St Matthew's Gospel, with its five blocks of Jesus's teaching carefully arranged within the narrative, one giant chiasmus.

The collect's phrasing echoes Jesus's words to his disciples in John 14:18a, which in the underlying Greek is literally, "*I will not leave you orphans*". The underlying collect in the Sarum Missal also says "orphans" in its Latin. In 1549 Cranmer and his colleagues may well have been influenced in their replacement choice of "comfortless" by the Great Bible of 1539. That Bible made use of William Tyndale's translation.

He was the first to render into English the New Testament from the underlying Greek, and he had "*I will not leave you comfortless*" (1534), "comfortless" here embracing both the idea of weakness and that of bereavement.

The collect expresses a deep longing: through it we "beseech" God for the strengthening, consoling and reassuring Holy Spirit.

*James Graham*

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