



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

(Book of Common Prayer)

Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service: Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Originally in the Leonine Sacramentary, this collect was appointed in the Sarum Missal for this Sunday. The 1549 Prayer Book translated the underlying Latin of the petition in a literal way, as follows: *“Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so run to thy heavenly promises, that we fail not finally to attain the same”*. This was more freely paraphrased into its present form for the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (which also added “the merits of” in the concluding phrase).

“Whose only gift” means ‘through whose gift alone’. And “true” in the collect means ‘worthy’. In this way, the prayer’s opening words highlight God’s grace: it is only through his prompting and inspiration that we are enabled to offer him the service of our lives in a way that is worthy of his nature and his love.

“True and laudable” form a pairing typical of the collects. And the alliterative effect created by “faithfully...life...fail not finally” is equally typical, impressing us with the collect’s carefully crafted nature.

We noted last Sunday (Trinity 12) that the themes of prayer, mercy and forgiveness feature in the collects repeatedly. And this repetition we attributed to the insecure and unpredictable historical circumstances that formed the context for the collects’ composition. The religious imagination was mutating in the face of calamitous times, especially in the sixth and seventh centuries, and this produced a particular emphasis on sin, on atonement, and on the individual person’s prospects after death. Prayers therefore came to focus on the after-life and the hope of heavenly bliss, and the fulfilment of God’s loving purposes. This collect is an example of such a prayer: it asks God that we may serve him so faithfully “that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises”.

The hope that God will bring human history to a final conclusion is part of the Christian faith. It is an aspect that obtains an especial emphasis whenever Christians are living through trying and painful times. It expresses the Christian longing that God will come to right all wrongs and to banish suffering and hardship. Trusting that God will, come what may, have the final word helps us calmly set about our “true and laudable service”.

James Graham

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