



## *St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd*

### The Collect for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

*(Book of Common Prayer)*

**Keep, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy; and, because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

The 1662 Prayer Book inherited this collect from the Prayer Book of 1549. 1549 translated the Latin collect for this Sunday in the Sarum Missal. And that Missal gleaned it from the Gelasian Sacramentary. It exhibits familiar and typical traits of a well-constructed and flowing collect in English, with alliterations between “frailty” and “fall” and between “help” and “hurtful”, and with a verbal echo in the two requests “keep us” and “lead us”.

Prayer for the Church, which this collect exemplifies, recurs in the collects. We have noted in various reflections on the collects that the centuries during which they were composed were, generally speaking, eras of insecurity and fear. It appears that the composers wanted to sink their individuals fears and longings in the wider aspirations of the Church at large. At the time the collects were prepared for the 1549 Book of Common Prayer there were again great upheavals in the Church, and a rupture (or ruptures) that we call the Reformation. The Reformers, however, were desiring to reform the Church, not to destroy it. Perhaps one reason why the collects were kept at all (albeit transformed, and in English) is that Cranmer and other English Reformers found that the themes in the collects, including that of prayer for the Church, resonated with their own experiences, fears and hopes.

The word that underlies the English “frailty” is the Latin for mortality. This is a helpful substitution, not only for the alliteration it creates but also for the clarity it brings to the intent behind the replaced Latin word. ‘Mortality’ was used to emphasise human failing, in that we often tend to thoughts and actions which cut us off from God. Our sinfulness amounts to a death-wish as opposed to the life affirming love revealed in Christ. “Frailty” expresses the same thought but in a more accessible way. We have a weakness or a flaw which alienates us from God and each other which we call sin.

The collect seeks to counteract this tendency to sin. It prays both for protection: “keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful”; and also for guidance: “lead us to all things profitable to our salvation”. It is God who offers this protection and guidance through his “perpetual mercy”. This is yet another way of describing God’s grace, his open-ended free gift of transforming love, a theme or doctrine which is one of the hallmarks of the collects.

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