



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

(Book of Common Prayer)

Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The earliest record we have of this prayer is its appearance in the Leonine Sacramentary, which may originate in the fifth century. It was one among several for use at Vespers. The Sarum Missal (and earlier prayer books) make use of it as the collect on this Sunday. Cranmer (or his associates) translated it from Latin for the 1549 Prayer Book, ancestor to the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, but a literal translation would have read “...*that we may deserve to obtain that which thou dost promise...*”. Cranmer eliminated from the collect any suggestion that we can earn or deserve what God promises.

Two phrases balance each other in this collect: “that which thou dost promise” and “that which thou dost command”. This is an example of the way Cranmer and the English reformers handled the pithy, concise Latin original collects. They had to replace them with English verbal rhythms. In this way, the originals were not so much translated as transmuted: they were expanded, and the hard, artistic brilliance of the originals was succeeded by an English style that combined simplicity, warmth and a certain verbal play.

It will be recognised that this prayer is based on Paul’s writing in 1 Corinthians 13, which concludes, “*And now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity*” (verse 13). The collect asks for an increase of all three, for it is utterly impossible to strive for faith, hope and love in our own strength. Cranmer was surely right to excise any suggestion to the contrary. The three crowning virtues are not badges of our own achievement, but the gifts of God which we seek through prayer and through opening up our lives to him.

Last week (Trinity 13) the theme of God’s promise was touched on. It is referred to again in this prayer, along with “that which (God does) command”. This raises the question: what is it that God commands?

Jesus endorses the lawyer's summary of the law, the Jewish religious code, in Luke 10:27, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself"*. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) he is depicted as a new Moses giving us a new law, the law of love. That new law reaches a pinnacle in Matthew 5:38: *"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"*. As we contemplate such a demanding injunction, we are thrown back onto God's love and mercy shown us in Christ. Only God can *"make us to love that which thou dost command"*.

James Graham
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