



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

(Book of Common Prayer)

Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve: Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

This is the third Sunday in a row that Common Worship (2000) retains this collect (slightly adapted) along with the 1662 Prayer Book. And this is not surprising since this is a beautiful and well composed prayer. It is a free translation into English of a Latin collect in from the Gelasian Sacramentary which was appointed for this Sunday in the Sarum Missal. The ending in the 1549 Prayer Book reads “*giving unto us that our prayer dare not presume to ask, but through Jesus Christ our Lord*”. That was altered in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer to “*giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord*”.

This improved conclusion, with its alliterative pairing “*merits and mediation*”, completes a collect which demonstrates the best skills of English phrasing. There is the contrast between hearing and praying in the opening lines; then the alliteration in the words “*desire*” and “*deserve*”; and then also the echoing relationship between “*forgiving*” and “*giving*”.

This collect covers the openness of God to our praying, God’s merciful nature, and our need for forgiveness. These themes are woven into the collects again and again. The circumstances in which most of our Prayer Book collects arose – the unrest of the fifth to the eight centuries in the west of Europe – go a long way to explain the concentration of these and related themes in the collects. It is very likely that people during these centuries of insecurity felt powerless, vulnerable, and longed for mercy and hope.

There are several reasons why we often find ourselves unable or unwilling to pray, and one of them is highlighted in this prayer. It is the sense that we are not in a position to ask of God because of a feeling of unworthiness.

Yet it is through prayer that we may tap into God's forgiveness and loving mercy; and to encourage us the collect reminds us that it is Jesus's merits that we rely on in prayer, not on our own.

It may well be that something – or perhaps several things - are on our mind, on our conscience, at this time. We are nevertheless encouraged by this collect to come to God afresh in prayer; he is “always more ready to hear than we to pray”.

James Graham
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