



The Sunday next before Advent  
*The Collect.*

**S**TIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. 7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. 8 Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; 9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began (2 Tim 1:6-9)*

A strong counsel for the Christian of any time of persecution, and of those who live, as we do, in a world of watered-down faith and easy-believism. Regardless the number of Sundays in Trinity Season, this COLLECT must always be the COLLECT of choice on the Sunday next before Advent Season. (See rubric following the Gospel for 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity in 1928 BoCP, or following the Gospel for 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in the 1662 English BoCP). The title referenced above was not used by Cranmer but was restored to its ancient title by the 1892 American Prayer Book (from the Sarum Missal). The Collect was famous for its beginning words – "Stir up" – so much so that the Sunday of its use was popularly labeled, "Stir Up Sunday"!

The words, "Stir up," summarizes the fullness of the Gospel preached in its entirety. It relates to that most powerful aspect of the human nature – the WILL! If it is the will of a man or woman to become rich in the material riches of this world, it is very likely that he or she shall surely become wealthy if that will is strong enough – even to the detriment of character and virtue! The WILL is that overt and compelling manifestation of what is hidden in the heart. The heart that belongs to Christ may, indeed, become wealthy in giving and caring, but wealth is never the superseding goal of such a heart. The problem with the rich young ruler was not his wealth, but that he allowed his wealth to blind his eyes to his duty to God. (see Mark 10 & Luke 18) When we take all virtue, all godliness, all compassion, all love, et all., that we have been granted in Christ, we need to `stir-up' these qualities and devotions from time to time in order to bring them back up from the depths of forgetfulness and revive them to a fresh and lively currency.

The will of the sinner, while free of the godly restraints of righteousness, is a completely free will. However, when a heart is given over to Christ as Lord and Savior, it is that Mind and Will of Christ that takes possession of that former will of the world and transforms the heart to godliness. Do not preach to me of Calvin or Arminius – but only of Christ and His Word. Both these men were stellar scholars. Each 'got it right' at some point, but those moments of correct interpretation only followed learning of truth gained from Holy Scripture. So why not, instead of quoting some good man, go to the Fountain of Truth Itself rather than drinking downstream?

You may ask: "How do we 'stir up' our Godly wills of faithfulness to God?" **We** do not, but God DOES! He does so through the preaching and hearing of the Word! *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17) But wait! Suppose you have already heard the glorious Gospel and yet sleep? One of my favorite means to allow God to 'stir up' my faith is through the singing of hymns – whether alone or with family, or friends. Nothing touches my soul more than scripturally-based classical hymns. (You may keep your Gospel songs filled with pabulum, thank you!) But suppose my heart is closed to every means of being stirred up by conscious rebellion? How will God elect to 'stir up' my faith? *But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.* (Romans 10:18-19) I personally prefer the more gentle stirring of love and remembrance than to be stirred up by jealousy and anger. But God will use whatever mechanism He deems useful to stir us up.

Though God may use the wills of evil nations in bringing judgment, He only **stirs up** the wills of faithful people in service to Him. With what result does God stir up our hearts? With the results that our faith again becomes foremost in our daily living, and our fruits of righteousness and good works are multiplied over and over again. Such fruits are not ours, but belong to the Sower who sowed the Seed in our hearts at the beginning. When we are a useful vessel to God, He will use us more and more as a favored vessel in His Hand just as a loving mother may have an old iron skillet or stone bowl that she treasures above even more expensive and beautiful vessels in her kitchen. If we, as Christians, are able to hold our 'heat of the Spirit' as the heavy iron skillet holds its heat from the oven, God will be more disposed to use such a proven and useful vessel. Moreover, He will reward such a vessel by placing it in a favored place in the cabinet of Heaven. He will often clean and polish it even more for future use. Personally, I would rather be an old, blackened iron skillet than a beautiful, French porcelain vase on the mantle. If God will use me to prepare food for His Children, how much greater honor can I have?

We have a mere four more Sundays before the blessed observance of Christmas. The Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as a precious baby at Bethlehem stirred the hearts of kings, rulers, wise men, and shepherds. Christ always stirs our hearts!

When God stirs up the wills of His faithful people, such a stirring can only result in greater production of fruit somewhat as life-giving rain on a parched field planted with wholesome seed. If we produce plentifully in good works, this gives the Father the opportunity to reward us with even more Rain of Blessing. Is there a smell of rain in your heart today, dear Reader?