



The Fourth Sunday after Easter.

The Collect.

O ALMIGHTY God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The upheavals that attended the government of Great Britain under the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell resulted in a change of opening words of this Collect. The Prayer Book and Episcopacy of the Church of England were viewed with an unfriendly eye by the new regime. The wording of the Gelasian Sacramentary, and that of all previous Books of Common Prayer, had begun: *“O Almighty God, which dost make the minds of all faithful people to be of one will...”* The near-dictatorial government under Oliver Cromwell, designated Lord Protector for Life, was unfriendly to the Church of England and thus the wording was changed in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer to its current use. This was a pretended recognition that not all who call themselves Christians practice the faith and works of Christ. I personally prefer the wording recognized by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer cited in this paragraph and consistent with the Gelasian Sacramentary. It is in complete conformity with the Word of God that all Christians should be at one Mind with Christ.

We know that in the Providence of God, all things fall before the Mind and Will of God and will conform to that Mind and Will – even the sins of desperate sinners will be turned to the victory of the Lord and His Church. ***O ALMIGHTY God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men*** We all can recount experiences in our lives in which we have been harshly wronged, but later discover that the evil intended was turned to victory under the love and guidance of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even wicked men, such as Judas Iscariot – though they intend evil – are molded to serve the over-ruling will of God our Father.

John Newton was an evil sea captain who dealt in the disgraceful trade of slaves. He was a drunkard and a profane man whom, not only the slaves he mistreated, but his crew as well loathed and hated him for his cruelty. Once on a voyage to England, the vessel he was aboard came under a withering storm and gales that threatened to destroy the ship. The main mast was broken, and the ship's wooden hull threatens to collapse. It was in the midst of this peril and trouble that seemed sent from the very jaws of Hell that the best good was ever done John Newton. He went down into the depth of the ship and began, for the first time since he had sat at his mother's knee, and prayed with all of his heart – not just for physical, but spiritual, salvation. The seas calmed, and Newton was spared for better things. As a result, John Newton became one of the most powerful men of God England has ever produced. The memorable hymn, Amazing Grace, was a product of that dark and stormy night on the sea. His Olney hymns still populate the traditional hymnals of all churches.

Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest Do you love the Commandments of God? Is it even possible to love God and hate His Commandments that reveal His nature and Character? Every Christian reading this devotion should be able to confess the words of David the King without equivocation: ***111 Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart. 112 I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end. 113 I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love. 114 Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word. 115 Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.*** (Psalms 119:111-115) Only the true people of God can make this confession. Do you hate any of the Commandments of God? Are there secret sins that you harbor in your heart? What about bearing false witness or adultery – even imagined sins? ***2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*** (1 John 5:2-3)

“...and desire that which thou dost promise.” Do we masticate every word of the Lord's Prayer which we repeat at every worship service, or do we simply roll the words past our heart from rote memory. ***“Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.”*** Do we pray for HIS will to be done, as did Christ, or do we pray continually for our OWN wills to be done? Do you ask more of God than your daily bread? ***“Give us this day, our daily Bread.”*** Has He ever refused you your absolute needs, especially daily Bread? He has promised us to be with Christ in the Eternity Future. Is this your utmost desire? Here is the greatest of all promises: ***2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*** (John 14:2-3) This is the end of all faith, is it not?

“...that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts

may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found We all follow after that which we love most. If we love God's Commandments, we will follow them out of our Love of God and not out of constraint. Of course we fall short of perfect obedience, but with our hearts fixed on God and His Law, we shall surely improve our obedience with practice (sanctification). The General Confession for Morning/Evening Prayer epitomizes our plight: *"We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders."* These offense best not become habitual. *19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. 20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me* (Romans 7:19-20) The grace of God, through the working of the Holy Ghost, will amend our desires and characters continually in causing our characters to become ever more virtuous and our desires to obey to become ever more steadfast.

What is the greatest joy of our occupations? To love the very thing that our hands are paid to do. There is no more perfect profession than to love that profession by which one makes his living. There can be no greater joy in life than to love the guidance of the Guide whom you follow. This is the paradise which we may enjoy even in this world.