

Devotion on the Collect for the Second Week after The Epiphany - 22 January 2013,
Anno Domini



The Second Sunday after The Epiphany.

The Collect.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Long before we ever ask a favor of a friend, we should first know if he is able to grant that favor. The salutation and address of this great Collect profoundly admits of God's ability to grant the favor we ask in praying this Collect. It is a mighty favor of mercy that we ask, and He is ALMIGHTY to perform it. That peace for which we yearn we can in no manner deserve, for we have broken the peace with God in Eden. Our disobedience, both once and continual, are acts of a belligerent and not of a friend; yet, we cannot save ourselves FROM ourselves. There must be a power from without who will come to our rescue. God has provided that power through His Son, Jesus Christ! Since He is an EVERLASTING God, the favors of mercy He grants are of an everlasting nature – from Eternity Past, to Eternity Future.

If one examines the original Latin form for this prayer, he will discover a great difference in meaning and application to that which Archbishop Cranmer has rendered more powerfully for the `peace of God.' The peace desired in the original Latin is an outward form of peace in our surroundings, but Cranmer added the true power of the Gospel in rendering the peace petitioned as "Thy Peace" – the Peace of God which is inward and sure. I have given an illustration before, but one which seems most appropriate for this occasion, of a great philanthropist of the arts who once offered a competition for a work of art best depicting true peace.

He solicited the works of all artists, young and old, aspiring or accomplished, to participate for a great prize in gold. Most artists, loving art more than personal fortunes, submitted their works hoping to derive income to enable them to pursue their chosen field without worry of food or lodging. There were a number of truly excellent submissions of great technical and artistic merit that tried to capture the essence of peace. Finally, the judges narrowed the field down to two works of art – one by a fine

and well-known artist, and the other by an aspiring young girl who lacked training, or money to acquire it. The accomplished artist had portrayed a beautiful pastoral scene with sheep peacefully grazing in the morning light on a gently sloping hillside. The shepherd stood nearby, watchful and protective of the sheep – a young man of impressive stature wielding a large shepherd's staff crooked at the top and sharp on the opposite end to defend the sheep from wolves. The young girl had submitted her 'labor of love' (in less technically superb execution) of a great mountain waterfall with its turbulent waters cascading hundreds of feet down the upper ledge of the mountain. The sight was daunting with the mist rising from the violence of the deluge. This depiction did not at first seem to be very testimonial of peace. But then, the judges noticed a tree branch BEHIND the cascading waters with a bluebird's nest. The mother was sitting on her nest seemingly oblivious to the violence all around. This work of art took the prize, for true peace is not dependent on our surroundings, but the condition of a faithful heart. That truly illustrates the peace of God (Thy Peace!)

This peace of God can only come to us through the redemption of the One who purchased it for us – our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.* (John 14:27) Isn't He lovely and kind beyond all human understanding! It is not the peaceful environment around us that is the arbiter of peace, but the peace that frees the heart of troubling fears and doubts. *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* (Phil 4:7) Do we not appreciate the biblical beauty passed on to us through the form of worship provided in the Book of Common Prayer which has us pray this last verse from Philippians as benedictory to each Holy Communion Service – and do we hear these words with calloused hearts, or do they remain fresh and alive at every hearing?

In this Collect, we acknowledge the overruling power of God in His governance of "*all things in heaven and earth.*" We repeat this prayer – do we believe the words we have prayed? Is God the indisputable Sovereign of your heart, Friend? Do you seek His will for your life, not sometimes, but always? Do you act on His counsels so abundantly provided in His Word for your health? Regardless the storms and rigors of life, do you have the assurance that all is subject to His power and that He CARES even for little YOU? Are you not worth far more than two sparrows? The story is told of a young boy walking the streets of a Latin American city carrying a cage with two sparrows. As he went about hawking (pardon the pun) his charges to every passerby, he was approached by an elderly gentleman who asked, "How much for the sparrows?" "Fifty pesos each," responded the boy. "Well, here is your 100 pesos for the two of them," said the gentleman. The boy watched curiously as the elder gentleman opened the cage and set the sparrows free. "Why'd you do that, Mister? Are you crazy?" "No, responded the gentleman. I simply value sparrows more than 100 pesos, and God created them to be free." Another illustration was discovered on our first trip to the Philippines. On the 500 pesos bill appears the inscription: "The Filipino is worth dying for." Very true, but no less true that every single soul of every tribe and nation, for whom Christ bled and died, is worth dying for.

Not only do we petition God to hear the prayers of His people, but to grant their petitions through His great mercy. You may say: "But God always hears our prayers!" Not so! *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.* (Psalms 66:18) And you may say, "But God will ALWAYS grant the thing for which we ask if our hearts are honest." Again, not so! Like a good and loving child, we may ask our father for things which will not profit us but, au contraire, may harm us. The father will not grant such

petitions if it is not His will to do so. He will always know our needs better than we do. *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts* (James 4:3)

Finally, we do not pray for this peace for the moment, but it is the everlasting peace we seek of a heart owned by God through Jesus Christ. "...*all the days of our life*." The kind of peace that God offers is not likened to that peace which comes at the armistice of wars fought on earth. There has never been an earthly peace treaty that has sealed the peace for more than a few years or decades. But the heart that belongs to Christ has the assurance of a continual peace in all of this life, and even a greater in the life to come. Do you have that peace, Friend?