



A Study of the Collect for the Day

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity.

The Collect.

LET thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. (Psalms 66:18)

There is an interesting account in the life of the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte at the zenith of his power. A distraught mother approached the military genius with a plea for mercy and pardon for her son. The Emperor responded that the young man had committed two separate offenses deserving death, and justice demanded the sentence to be carried out. "But it is not justice for which I ask" responded the distraught woman, "but it is mercy that I plead for my son." "But your son does not deserve a grant of mercy!" Napoleon replied. "Sir," she answered, "If my son deserved mercy, it would not be mercy, and mercy is all that I seek!" "Well, then," replied the Emperor, "I shall grant mercy," and he pardoned the woman's son.

The Collect for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity makes a petition in two points: 1) that God open His ears of mercy in hearing our prayers, and 2) that the Holy Ghost will conform our hearts and desires to ask for those things only that are pleasing to God.

OPENING GOD'S EARS OF MERCY: Mercy is a powerful characteristic that gives birth to unmerited grace. It is worth noting that God's ears are 'merciful.' This is not a casual description of God's 'ways' but rather a magnification of a salient characteristic of God – His Ears are FULL of mercy to hear our prayers. Why do we need mercy? It is because justice would condemn us all to the fires of Hell. We do not become sinners at a certain time because we exercised our free will to sin – we are born sinners and are yoked with a nature that can do no good. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.* (Psalms 51:5) The only so-called free will that we have is a will to sin. When we have been brought into a close relationship with Christ, our wills to do good are no longer ours, but His. Apart from the imputed righteousness of Christ, we continue as born sinners, and are sinners by our very natures inherited from the blood of Adam. So justice we must escape if we will live, and it is mercy and grace that is the only remedy for our sinfulness.

"LET thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants." Is there anything that will stop those ears of mercy in being attendant to our prayers? The 18th verse of the 66th Psalm quoted above is one cause that God will not hear our prayers. If we are NOT humble servants, but rather have hearts populated by sinful thoughts (even thoughts that do not materialize in sinful actions) God will not hear our prayers. If the sinners free will rules in his heart, God has no reason to be merciful or to hear the prayer. Once our eyes and ears are open to God, His will be open to us. *Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.* (John 9:31)

Even an obedient and humble child may petition the parent for some candy or sweet that is not wholesome for his health. The child knows not the food pyramid and the harm in neglecting it, so the parent knows better and will deny, at times, the innocent, but unhealthy, request of the child. God does so as well. *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.* (James 4:3) If we expect God to listen intently to our prayers, we must deport ourselves as sons and daughters belonging to a great King, and mindful of our familial responsibilities to that Sovereign Parent. If our hearts are to receive the abundance in blessings for which we plead, those hearts must not be brim full of thoughts of iniquity or malice. They must be hearts empty of the world and full of the Spirit of God and His Mind. We dare not ask an urgent favor of one with whom we have had bitter quarrels, but we are very likely to run to the feet of one with whom we have long been friends – one whose mind is consistent with our own thinking. Why is this so? Because like minds are more generous to one another. *For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.* (1 Cor 2:16) Many good and honest men and women have resolved to be righteous, and with earnest intent; but they discover that their free wills cannot achieve righteousness. Before a moment passes they find themselves dogged by many sinful desires and words. If we will be righteous, we must rid our hearts of our human free wills, and take on the Mind that is in Christ to do HIS will and not our own sinful wills. Having that MIND will open the ears of mercy in Heaven to our prayers. *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus* (Phil 2:5)

ASKING FOR THOSE THINGS PLEASING UNTO GOD: What things may a child ask that is pleasing to a human parent? "Dad, I am having trouble with a bully at school. Will you give me some advice?" or, "Mom, many girls in the sixth grade wear make-up. They ridicule my plain appearance. How should I respond?" These are simple

pleas for help in real problems that confront the child. The parent realizes the seriousness to the child of such problems and is pleased that the child came to the parent for help. The parent desires the same result as the child – the bullying to be dealt with, or the daughter to be equipped to deal with the wrong kind of peer pressure at school. The petition is a reasonable one seeking good results and not harmful ones. God is exactly like the parent in hearing the petitions of His children. He is pleased when we ask for those things that He is already inclined to grant even before our asking. The lectionary readings today reflect, in the Gospel of St Luke 19, the immeasurable mercy of Christ over Jerusalem as He wept over the city. He wanted so desperately to grant them mercy, but they had a different MIND and would have none of it. The problem with our prayers is that they are often too ME-centered. Give ME a promotion at work; give ME the new house I am seeking to acquire; give ME some stellar gift that sets me apart and above my fellows. These prayers ask things that are not pleasing to God to grant. But if we ask for those things that will bless God's heart and are in conformity with His own Will, how rich and profound will be our blessing. What is that greatest blessing of being of one Mind with God? *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* (Phil 4:7) We, too, must be willing and able to bear a cross of suffering for others as Christ has born for us: *Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind* (1 Peter 4:1) Which mind? The Mind of Christ. If ever you are confronted with an honest moment of doubt as to whether or not an action or thought is Godly, just imagine that Christ is standing right beside you (for He is). Does that thought change the context of doubt for you? Reader, are you a humble servant in your prayers? Do you seek to ask for those things only that you know to be pleasing to God? If you do not know that which is pleasing to God, then that forms the basis for another very Godly prayer, doesn't it?

This Collect sets an excellent example of a prayer that God will love to hear. The petition is not for personal advantage, but uttered from humility, and a sincere desire to ask only for those things pleasing to God. The wisdom inherent in such a prayer is this: that our minds be conformed to that of the Mind of Christ so that the things we ask are really those things which He is predisposed to grant and consistent with His favor.