

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

The Collect.

O GOD, who declarest thy almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity; Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Collect for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity is beautiful as it is in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer; however, the wording has been changed by the revisers of the 1662 and 1928 Prayer Books. The change made from the original wording of the Gelasian Collect as accurately translated by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer makes the prayer more legalistic than graceful. The change occurs in the second clause of the prayer: "*Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments.*" The translation of that phrase by Cranmer made our reception of grace a matter of mercy and pity on God's part (there is no OTHER part): "*Give unto us abundantly thy grace, that we, running to thy promises, etc, etc.*" This restores the grant of grace back into the Hands that are the only ones capable of giving it. I will always prefer to run to the promises of God rather than to His Commandments though I love His Law.

Cranmer and the English Reformers wove the lectionary together brilliantly to reflect the wide expanse of God's consistent plan for man and his salvation from the Books of the Law, History, Poetry, Prophets (Major & Minor), to the beauty and profundity of those truths laid out and extended in the New Testament. The Old Testament mirrors our inability to earn our salvation by way of perfect obedience and, so, the Law is a curse to us. Perhaps this is why God ends His Old Testament books with the word "curse": *And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.* (Mal 4:6) So, also, does the Gospel text for today (Luke 18:9-14) fit nicely with God's desire to see hearts thrown upon the throne of grace and mercy (as was that of the publican) rather than, as the Pharisee, lifted up in prideful boasting and self-righteousness.

If there was any great truth re-established by the great Reformers of England, and Luther of Germany, was the fact that we are not saved by the good works of our hands, but by GRACE alone! *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.* (Eph 2:8-9) Martin Luther fairly nailed the matter when he said, "*Woeful sinners like you and me are justified – made righteous – by our faith in Jesus Christ. Neither "good" works nor the "intercession" of other sinful men can save us from God's just wrath. Christ is our intercessor.*"

Looking at the Collect sequentially, we read of the greatest demonstration of the powers of God – that of showing mercy and pity. Have you ever considered the power of these two characteristics? A man who is hopelessly drowning in a storm-tossed sea is incapable of showing pity to another victim of the billows of the sea. He may FEEL pity, but he cannot SHOW it for he has his own troubles keeping his head above the briny foam. We have all been, and some remain, lost seaman in the waters of the sea. Abandoned by the vessel that afforded us safety, we are lost in the dark waters. Only

the trailing lights of the distant ship's stern can we see. Now what power has such a person to show mercy or pity to another in such a serious predicament? I aver that in our perils in the sea of life, we are incapable until one greater than us shows mercy and pity to us. He commands the waves of the sea to be at peace, He calms the ominous thunder, and He raises a platform upon which our feet may be supported. This kind of power to show grace, mercy, and pity is not available from any source other than the Almighty God! If we have received it, we are more able to share it.

There was a time when our lifeblood was hot and full of vigor. We danced upon the hills and valleys of life with the enthusiasm and joy of youth. But what of the dark days that loom ahead when the clouds return after the rain? We no longer have that unlimited reservoir of youth to call upon. Our body no longer responds to the challenges of life. We stumble and see darkly. Our friends have left the battlefield and we are often alone with our crutches. Then what? Do we not have that same power to call upon that visited us as a constant Maker while we were in our mother's womb? If we have not that power, hope is forlorn; but, with that great Friend and Maker as our constant companion, we need not fear the crumbling banks of Jordan Waters. As we stand on the mysterious precipice of physical death, we may feel the earth and sand settle beneath our feeble feet, the darkness is falling though the day is Noon. The life breath is escaping our ability to draw it. What then? If we have made our salvation sure in Christ, He will neither leave us nor forsake us at that moment by the Waters of Jordan. Let the banks crumble and the sands sink – He is there to lift up our sagging souls and bear us up on wings as eagles. That great everlasting arm that guided Moses by the Red Sea will not fail you either at that moment of your passage into His Presence. Do you have assurance of that, Reader?

Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace Please note that none can receive or contain ALL of God's grace for it is a bottomless sea for abundance. We need only a measure thereof. That measure of His grace is like the slightest droplet from Calvary's Cross. That single droplet of the Lord's Blood is sufficient for thee. *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me* (2 Cor 12:9)

Next, I prefer Cranmer's translation for beauty and accuracy over that of the revisers of 1662: "*Give unto us abundantly thy grace, that we, running to thy promises.*" It is far more biblically sound to run to the promises of God than to be so self-righteous as to run the way of His Commandments. This in no way diminishes our responsibility under God's Laws and Commandments, for we are held to their standard in life, but we are not saved through our good works and obedience to the Law. We are saved UNTO good works by grace, not BY them. We have no native righteousness, so we must ask Christ to cover us with His own righteousness imputed.

The most powerful men, in my opinion, are strong gentlemen who possess the ability to be bullies, but rather display great compassion and mercy under circumstances that the world considers undeserving of such compassion and mercy. The same is true of virtuous ladies who forgo the temptation to share a tale or a bit of gossip on their prying neighbor and, instead, commend all that is commendable in their neighbors' characters. Following is an excellent example of gentlemanly compassion on the part of, arguably, the greatest Commander this country has ever fielded: "*Out reconnoitering one day with a very partisan officer, Lee was shocked when the man*

exclaimed that he wished all the enemy were dead. "How can you say that, General?" Lee exclaimed. "Now, I wish that they were all at home attending to their own business, and leaving us to do the same." After Appomattox, he confided to a friend that had never seen a day when he did not pray for the enemy. (Douglas Southall Freeman, R.E. Lee, a Biography, 1934)

All of the promises of God are promises of grace: "...*may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure.*" Have we been tasked with hard labors and perfect obedience to the Commandments of God ere He grants us His gracious promises? Not at all for that would not be grace! It is by the agency of grace, mercy, and pity that the Lord looks to sinners and publicans who lay their burdens down at His compassionate feet. If we lay down our war books down by the riverside, just as the captive Children of Israel hung their harps on the willows of Babylon, we shall study war no more, but rather study peace, mercy, and grace. *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof* (Psalms 137:1-2) Little did these men and women, lost in despair and forlorn of hope, realize that God had already prepared a salvation for them and a return to Jerusalem through the very man God called His anointed, Cyrus, who would not only send them home, but pay their way as well. For every staggering calamity in the life of a Christian, God has prepared a means of rescue. Do you believe that, Reader?