



The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity.

The Collect.

LORD, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

10 For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: 11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. 12 To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. 13 But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. (Isaiah 28:10-13)

Today's Collect reminds me of a fundamental principle of learning – there are others, but this one is applicable to today's Collect. That principle is "repetition aids retention". It was one of those laws with which I became intimately familiar and one which I employed to great effect in my career in the training and education of military aviators. A maneuver often repeated will be remembered easily. A certain rule of meteorology, or of aerodynamics, often repeated and tested, will be retained over the lifetime of the military pilot. The Bible itself is a monument to this principle. We see the same principles of salvation, redemption, sanctification, etc, featured in multi-faceted accounts throughout the Holy Bible, and much to our profit. The same is true of the Collects which are, themselves, based on scriptural truths.

I once read of an event in the ministry of the great Charles Spurgeon in England. Mr. Spurgeon had given the exact SAME sermon four Sundays in a row. Frustrated and a bit indignant, one of the congregants asked him if he was aware that he had given the same sermon four Sundays running. "Yes, I am aware of it," responded Spurgeon. "But why the same sermon four times?" asked the congregant. "That is simple to explain," replied Spurgeon. "When you begin to heed the sermon, I will go on to the next."

LORD, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us. It is a mighty comfort to know that God's grace not only follows in the wake of our service as the people of God, but even PRECEDES (another meaning of prevent) the Elect in his/her daily walk. We do not worry about walking down a darkened path upon which the Lord has set our foot, because we KNOW that He is ever both BEHIND and BEFORE us. He is as the Pillar of Cloud by Day, and Pillar of Fire by Night, to both lead and follow His people in the Wilderness journey of this world. If God places our feet on a path, we must go the distance in faith no matter the utter desolation along the way. I am reminded of a quote by the scientist, Robert Jastrow (an agnostic at best) who ironically wrote in his book, *God and the Astronomers*: "For the scientist who has lived by faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."

".....and make us continually to be given to all good works." How can we be "given to good works?" It must have become a feature of our changed nature at the moment of conversion, and the sanctification that is to follow that conversion. It is the empowering genius of the Holy Spirit. Certainly, our salvation is none of our own doing, but the pure and whole work of grace; yet, the evidence of our salvation is the good works and purity of life that follows the soul's salvation.

Our revered and martyred Archbishop Cranmer translated this Collect from the *Sacramentary of Gregory*. The Latin word from which he translated the word 'continually' is *uigiter*. This Latin word means "like an overflowing stream." The grace granted to us to be called the sons and daughters of God is that same ceaseless grace that enables and directs our paths in righteous living. It is a sanctifying grace that continually refines our souls as the Refiners Fire. It never ceases, never becomes inadequate – but is ALWAYS profuse and wonderful in abundance. Lord, give us that grace that inspired the early church to stand against a world of ignorance and superstition. Is the world so different today from that of the first century Romans?

An army in the field needs certain provision. It needs, first of all, a logistical train that follows in its path. But even more important: it needs a leader to go before. The Captain of the Corps sets the standard in courage, resourcefulness, perseverance, and conduct. We have the resources of heaven upon which to call for our supply and logistical base, and we have the Lord Jesus Christ as the Captain of our souls who has already scouted out, mapped, and led the way to the field of battle. He stands as the Ensign at the extreme edge of the Battlefield urging us, not to go, but to FOLLOW Him! What a wonderful God, and magnificent Lord who both leads and follows! Have you called upon that abundant provision of God? Have you looked to the Field Commander as your inspiration and courage to advance against the enemy (Satan and his legions)?