

St. Matthew's Church
X Pentecost—5 August 2007

I am not going to do it, but I am tempted to ask a show of hands for how many people remember a sermon I preached about three years ago. On that particular Sunday I chose not to preach on one of the Scripture lessons but on the Collect of the day. The sermon was about Collects. I would hardly expect you to remember that sermon, but, if you do, I apologize in advance for repeating a few things. I want to preach on today's Collect, after I put the liturgical importance of Collects in some perspective.

First, today's Collect:

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen

I.

There are five things that change in our service every Sunday
In a liturgical church most is the same—familiar, comfortable
Three scripture lessons are new
A reading from the Psalms
And a short prayer—called a “Collect”
Most people hardly notice the Collect
It is so short and comes right at the beginning of the service

These prayers are among the oldest we have
Today's appears in an 8th C Mss—very old
These are real gems of Anglican spirituality
Have been used over and over again
Polished through centuries of use
I like to liken them to smooth stones that have been polished with the
constant flow of water in a brook

The oldest Collects have a set classical form
Always start with something about God
Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid...

Something about God who know our innermost thoughts and feelings

At first I thought this was missing in today's Collect

Today's prayer seems to be about the Church

But it is also about God

"Because it—the church— cannot continue in safety without your help"

God is essential to the Church (repeat)

In the Classic format, a Collect

Tells us something about God

Asks something of God

And ends "Through Jesus Christ"

This prayer today is not only ancient but it is also a classic Collect

II.

Many of you know I often preach about the Church

Maybe I do it too often

Caring for the Church as a whole is a bishop's responsibility—& for me a preoccupation

And I think you know that there is a crisis in our Church today

There are forces that are trying to pull the Church apart

Not only in congregations

But also dividing this great Anglican family around the world

Yes, it all seems to be about sexuality

But it also involves how we read Bible

And how we deal with change

This brings us back to our Collect for today

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness

We hear a lot about the supposed infallibility of the Pope

Roman Catholics are required to believe this—A dogma of the Church

We Anglican use another word—indefectibility

God gives the Church a lot of slack

Run by fallible human beings

God lets us make mistakes--freedom

But we believe that God will never let the Church stray too far before He brings it back

Ultimately the Church is in-defect-able

Over the centuries God has let the Church wander off the right path—even for a century or more—but God will not let the Church destroy itself

Remember how monasticism preserved the essence of the Church in the Middle Ages—the Dark Ages

Then the Reformation and the Counter Reformation provided another corrective the Church had lost its way in the 16th Century

John XXIII came along in the 20th C for RCs

Incidentally, (Do you know what Gringos in Latin America called Pope John XXIII? We called him “Juan two three”)

And now I hope you see how today Collect is about both God and the Church.

Remember that word-- indefectibility

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness

III.

And finally let's look at this same prayer—this same Collect—in three other different ways.

Do you know what “The Domestic Church“ is?

In ecclesiastical terminology the family is often called “The Domestic Church”

In a Christian home God is always the Head, as God is Head of the Church

This is where children learn the meaning of love

Their first introduction to God. God is love

Parents in a family are the first teachers of religion to their children

They teach with Bible stories,

Grace at meals/prayers at night

We teach by example

In the Domestic church we learn the meaning of Forgiveness

If we don't learn forgiveness there we may never understand it

We begin to learn about discipline

Those of us who live in a family should know that this Collect is not only about the ecclesiastical Church

We can pray it for the Domestic Church as well

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend our family; and because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness

2, In our Church we always pray for the government
Sometimes we need to do this more than others.
Many of us are troubled right now
about the political scene today
because of the war in Iraq
when our government does not seem responsive to the needs and
wishes of the people

Let us use this Collect to pray for our country

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend our nation; and because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness. AMEN

Remember the classic Collect (1) always tells us something about God; (2) always expresses our wish—our prayer; and (3) is always offered through Jesus Christ. When this Collect talks about God's *continual mercy* it is telling us something very important about God. God cares for us. God loves us. So, thirdly, why not make this Collect our personal prayer. It may seem like a selfish prayer, but there is nothing wrong with turning to God with our deepest concerns and problems.

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend me; and because I cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern me always by your goodness; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen