

COLLECT COMMENTARY

Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent (COE)/Proper 28 (BCP)

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Collect Commentary

The Collect in The Book of Common Prayer (1662) was written by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. It reflects the concern of the English Reformers that the Scriptures assume their proper authority and place, not only for doctrine and in worship, but also in daily living.

It is most fitting that at the beginning of the Christian Year the gift from God of the Holy Scriptures is celebrated by the Household of God. We, who are Christians, live in the light of the First Coming in humility of the Lord Jesus even as we look for his Second Coming in glory (see the Collect for Advent 1 for the Two Comings). All the time in this interim period of grace we are to be taught by his sacred Word, the Holy Scriptures.

This Collect is addressed to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is called "Blessed Lord." We are familiar with such expressions as "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel" (Luke 1:68) and "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). The general idea is that God, the Creator, is blessed (praised and adored) by all his creation and/or by his covenant people - the Latin would be benedictus. Then there is the further idea (see 1 Timothy 1:11 & 6:15) of God being "blessed" in the sense that his character and attributes are glorious and full of eternal beauty - the Latin would be beatus. Here it is benedictus (Benedicte Domine). Thus the Father is the Blessed Lord who is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and praised and adored by all creation and especially by the redeemed thereof.

Having identified and addressed the One to whom we desire to offer prayer, we then engage in a moment of meditative prayer, or recollection, as we remember a most significant fact in the relation of grace between God the Holy Trinity and man. He has

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caused all Holy Scriptures - the Canon with Two Testaments - to be written (and gathered and translated) for our benefit, salvation, sanctification, instruction and education.

And he has given this amazing gift to his people to be used under his perpetual care as a permanent possession for our good and his glory.

Being in the presence of the Lord Jesus and suitably recollected by the help of his Spirit, we are in a position to offer our basic and extensive petition. And this begins with a strong verb, "Grant." This verb carries the sense of being wholly and totally in need of the mercy of the One to whom supplication is offered. In other words, we who make this petition do really and truly need his favour and help in order to benefit from the supremely wonderful gift that he has placed in the hands of holy mother Church, even the Holy Scriptures.

The verbs used - hear, read, mark, learn & inwardly digest - are so arranged as to suggest perhaps the movement from initial, superficial acquaintance with the content of the Bible to the profoundest reception of that content deep in the soul, in the heart, mind and will, and in the fear of God. To hear is to hear both with the outer ear and with the inner ear and thus hear in the mind and the conscience, where the seed of the word of God must be sown. To read (which was not possible for all in the 16th century) is yet another route for the word to enter the soul. To mark is to pay close attention to what is heard and/or read, to meditate upon it, to chew the cud as it were. To learn is to commit to memory the essentials of what is heard and read. "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11). To digest the word of God can only occur when there has been the receiving, the noting, the meditating and the remembering, for, in digestion, the spiritual food (be it the milk or the solid food) enters the "blood stream" of the soul. "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103).

The result of the right reception of the Word of God is that (a) by patience; and (b) by the comfort of God's Word, we embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life ("blessed" here is beatus, pointing to the unique majestic glory of the Second Coming, which is the Christian hope). The patience is the patient waiting for the Second Coming of Christ to bring to an end this evil age and to inaugurate the age of the kingdom of God. And the "blessed hope" is also the glorious Appearing, the Second Coming of the Saviour. Thus a basic theme of the Collect is the right use of Scripture as a means of preparing for the Second Advent as we live in the Light of the first Advent. In other words, though it is a very appropriate prayer for the beginning of Advent and of the Church Year, it is also a prayer that is suitable every day and week!

And it ends with the full recognition that it is only through, by, in and with Christ Jesus that we go to the Father for succour and the Father comes to us with gifts and blessings.

The Gospel places before us one of the basic themes of Advent, the Second Coming in glory of the Lord Jesus Christ to judge the living and the dead. With the use of the Scriptures, we are to be prepared, to watch and to pray.

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