

"One Body, One Spirit in Christ"

Reflections on the Collects Trinity Sunday through Christ King

Written by members of the Diocese of Fond du Lac
for the members of our Diocesan Family
that we might be
"One Body, One Spirit in Christ"

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~ Foreword ~

This is “Volume V” in the on-going Gulick Series of Devotional Booklets, continuing the spirit of The Parish Press which operated from the 1920’s through the 1990’s at “Your Cathedral” at St. Paul’s.

This series was initiated in 2008 by the leadership of “Your Cathedral” – with guidance from Bishop Jacobus and Matthew Payne. What began as a *Cathedral* outreach to the Diocese has now become a *Diocesan* outreach within the Diocese and beyond.

Written *by* members of the Diocese (clergy and lay) *for* members of our Diocesan Family, 43 people have contributed reflections so far – 22 lay and 21 clergy. 11 are new in this volume; 24 have written more than once. Our authors have thus far come from 20 of our congregations, 1 from the Sisters’ Motherhouse, 1 from the University of the South (Sewanee), and 2 from congregations outside the Diocese. I thank *all* of our authors! Without them, this series could not continue! Thanks also to Sr. Columba, SHN for her ministry of “proof reading” the final booklet.

Unlike previous volumes, the reflections in this volume are based on the Collects of the “Sundays after Pentecost.” Since the “Sunday Collect” is often prayed at Morning and Evening Prayer as well as at some weekday celebrations of the Eucharist, it is possible that the “Sunday Collect” could theoretically be prayed as many as 21 times during the course of a week. We hope that, through our effort, these Collects may come to have a deeper meaning for us through these heartfelt reflections.

You will find our authors’ wide variety of approaches a celebration of the rich diversity within our Diocese – from which we continue to emerge as “*A community of disciples enthusiastically leading all people to transformation in Jesus.*”

Master pages for these booklets are mailed to each congregation in the Diocese, and it is then for each congregation – if each one’s leadership so chooses – to see to local duplication, assembly, and distribution to its members. Additionally, the Diocesan Office has been very kind in posting these pages on the Diocesan home page – diofdl.org.

These volumes benefit from your feedback, and I always welcome new authors to volunteer their service. I can be contacted at (920) 921-3363, or at brianbeno@charter.net. (*Note: 18 volunteers are needed for “Volume VI ~ Advent through Last Epiphany.”* If interested, kindly contact me at your earliest convenience. Assignments will be made after Labor Day.)

May God continue to bless our Diocese – our Bishop, clergy, and the members of our congregations – that we may be “*One Body, One Spirit in Christ*” (BCP 327).

Thank you, and many blessings!

~ Fr. Brian Beno
Editor, Gulick Series of Devotional Booklets

May 30 ~ First Sunday after Pentecost: Trinity Sunday

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity: Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

I found it exciting to have been asked to write about this Holy Day's Collect. There are over 500 churches in the Episcopal Church dedicated to the name of the Trinity, making it one of the top three most popular names for our churches. (I belong to one of the two in this diocese.) I began my life in the Episcopal Church at Gethsemane, Marion, IN, one of only seven churches with that name, making it one of the least common names.

From Gethsemane to Trinity. We came through the sacrificial season of Lent; celebrated the resurrection in all the glorious mystery of Easter; watched from the mountaintop on Ascension Day; waited for the gift of the Comforter – and now we honor the Trinity. Today we celebrate God as God. Instead of concentrating on his many marvelous works, we concentrate on the very being of God: not the sacred acts, but the Sacred.

Children can tell the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, and Jonah. They know about the birth in Bethlehem, the boy the teaching in the Temple, the miracle at Cana. Today's feast is more icon than story. We are given a glimpse of the Holy.

Probably the best source any Episcopalian would have on hand to explain the Trinity can be found on pages 864-865 of the Book of Common Prayer in "The Creed of Saint Athanasius." I re-read it before writing this piece. I can't say that it was very helpful to what I wanted to say about the Trinity, nor how I feel about the Trinity, nor how I experience the Trinity in my life.

Dame Julian of Norwich wrote: "Would you know your Lord's meaning? Know it well. Love was his meaning. Who showed it to you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show it? For love."

There it is. Love is what I want to say about the Trinity. Love is how I feel about the Trinity. Love is how I experience the Trinity in my life.

~ Karen D. Powers
Trinity, Oshkosh
Diocesan Director, Church Periodical Club

June 6 ~ Eucharistic Festival Weekend

God our Father, whose Son our Lord Jesus Christ in a wonderful Sacrament has left us a memorial of his passion: Grant us so to venerate the sacred mysteries of his Body and Blood, that we may ever perceive within ourselves the fruit of his redemption; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Holy Eucharist is the greatest of all mysteries.

- It is the most grand and worthy of honor of all the sacraments; for while they convey grace, in the Eucharist we have Jesus Christ Himself, the author of grace.
- It is an ever-living witness of the incarnation, sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord.
- It is the consummation of religion on earth, as it affords us the most intimate and perpetual communication with Jesus Christ.
- It is the essence of Christianity, as being the Sacrifice, in union with which the Christian makes that of Calvary applicable to himself.
- It is the possession of the Church on earth of Jesus Christ's real but veiled presence as she waits adoringly for His unveiling in the state of glory.

What we cannot have too much of is personal holiness. It is by more earnest devotion to the Blessed Sacrament that it can be increased. May I lovingly urge you, my dear brethren, to greater belief, trust, and love of our dear Lord in that wonderful mystery. Do not argue about it, but believe in it. Honor our Lord's Presence there by music, lights, flowers, and incense. He will honor those who love Him. He dwells in His Church. He veils His presence, but will unveil it in glory!

Press on the Kingdom!

~ Blessed Charles Chapman Grafton
Bishop, Diocese of Fond du Lac, 1889-1912

June 13 ~ Proper 6

Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The social network site FaceBook has become wildly popular in the past several years. What started out as an obscure way for college kids to keep in touch after graduation has turned into a site where you can keep tabs on your grandma who is in Tampa, and your 10 year old niece who is here in town, but still, it's fun to read her posts.

I, too, have caught the FB bug and peruse the site every day. Of course, it's not just social networking – the Diocese is on FB, as is the Cathedral. I update our page every week, and try to inform people of what's going on at "*Your Cathedral*." Anyone who is a member of the Cathedral group gets the updates in their news feed.

I have met quite a few new people on FaceBook. Not all of them I know in person. In reading today's Collect, it made me think of one of my FB friends.

Mary lives in North Carolina. I picked her as a friend because of some of her posts. They are religious in nature. Every day, she posts something called: "On this day, God wants you to know." One day I sent Mary a message and told her how much I enjoyed her posts, and that it was nice to see other followers (of Christ) out there. Her reply was touching – she apparently had been having a rough time, and my comments to her really brightened her day. It turns out that Mary has MS and is unable to work outside the home and feels pretty isolated. As our talks and messages continued, I mentioned that the Cathedral would pray for her. I then sent her the link to the Cathedral web page. She thought the building was so beautiful that she downloaded the picture of the front of the church and now has it on her computer as her wallpaper!

"That through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness" – when I read that I thought about Mary – my FaceBook friend who is a believer in God's kingdom – just like me!

~ Melanie Woodward
St. Paul's Cathedral, Fond du Lac

June 20 ~ Proper 7

O Lord, make us have perpetual love and reverence for your holy Name, for you never fail to help and govern those whom you have set upon the sure foundation of your loving-kindness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Our growth in walking the path of Christ is often a balance between the demanding aspects of our life of faith and the part that is purely gift and grace. *“Perpetual love and reverence”* seem to be reserved for those who are above average in their walk with Christ. It is a requirement that we often fail at achieving. We don't hold up our end of the agreement. Even though the Collect asks God to *“MAKE”* us have that perpetual love and reverence, it seems that God doesn't strong arm us into the right reverential behaviors.

I'll confess to being drawn to the later part of this Collect. The gift and grace come to me in the description of what God does. God never fails to help and govern. We might fail, but He does not. All that is necessary is that we are *“set upon the sure foundation of His loving-kindness.”* The best part is that we are not called upon to set ourselves on that foundation. God, the One we are petitioning, is the one who sets us on that sure foundation.

The foundation of our faith is not our right behavior or accurate beliefs. It is not our perfect prayers that are the foundation we are set upon. Our foundation is the loving-kindness of God that is given to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. I am thankful that the performance requirements of our life in God are not balanced equally with the grace God gives us. We could never match up. The loving-kindness of God overwhelms our attempts at love and reverence. The more we are aware of our foundation in that love, the more joy we have. In that joy, we can be grateful for God's gifts and commit ourselves once again to love and reverence of God.

~ Fr. Ralph Osborne
Rector, St. Thomas, Menasha

June 27 ~ Proper 8

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

God intends to build something. Divine energy is centered on building the Church with the prophets and the chosen eleven as the foundation. Anyone who has ever tried building anything knows how important it is to have a smooth, solid, firm footing.

It is, however, the rejected stone that is the key. Jesus is the key. The keystone is that architectural piece at the top of the arch. The keystone holds everything together, without it, the building crumbles.

The prophets and apostles are the base. Jesus is the crown. What about the walls? Remember the game we played as a child? With folded hands we made a church and with extended fingers a steeple. Our thumbs moved opening the doors and there were the people. You and I are the walls. In 1st Peter we read that we are the “living stones.” A living stone is solid and reliable, yet still growing and changing. What better material for building God’s kingdom?

When we become too rigid, we shatter and break. When we flex and change too much we weaken and dissolve. But living stones provide both the stability and the flexibility necessary for the building of a dynamic and growing church.

“Grant us so to be joined together in unity of the spirit . . . that we may be made a holy temple.”

~ Dick Bidwell
St. Mark’s, Waupaca

July 3 ~ Independence Day

Lord God Almighty, in whose Name the founders of this country won liberty for themselves and for us, and lit the torch of freedom for nations then unborn: Grant that we and all the people of this land may have grace to maintain our liberties in righteousness and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

I enjoy our American holidays, but I often wonder how often people pause to reflect on the “reason” for each of our holidays. For example, how many people reflect on the lives of our presidents on Presidents’ Day? So, I have come to the opinion that *national holidays* can be *personal holydays*. And perhaps there are no better examples than our three summer holidays:

- On **Memorial Day** we lovingly remember and solemnly honor our war dead – those who gave their lives that we might be free. In so doing, what a wonderful opportunity to also lovingly remember and solemnly honor Jesus as our ultimate war hero! Jesus faced the enemy of sin and evil, was seemingly tragically defeated, yet was ultimately victorious and triumphant – having defeated death, and winning for us the freedom of God’s sons and daughters! Remembering our national heroes, we can also honor Jesus as *the* war hero who changed all of history (so much so that we number our years in relation to his birth).
- So on this **Independence Day**, while rejoicing over our independence from foreign rule and celebrating our freedoms, we also have the opportunity to celebrate the freedom Jesus has gained for us. We are able to be independent from sin and evil; we can rise above slavery to “*the world, the flesh, and the devil*” (BCP 149). Yet to be independent from sin and evil is, because of our human weakness, to acknowledge our total dependence upon God. Recognizing our dependence upon God has us respond with gratitude that our hearts are beating, that our eyes are blinking, that we can breathe . . . and that we were blessed to be born, to be born when we were born, that we have known and been influenced by many good people, that we have been blessed with countless opportunities, and live in a nation so richly blessed! We are a people called to be “independent” from sin, “dependent” upon God always, and mutually “interdependent” upon one another as we “*strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being*” (BCP 305).
- Of course, though weeks away, **Labor Day** will complete our summer cycle of *personal holy days*: Honoring Christ as our ultimate war hero on Memorial Day; celebrating our independence from sin, our perpetual dependence upon God, and our mutual interdependence upon one another on Independence Day . . . on Labor Day we join together as a “*community of disciples enthusiastically leading all people to transformation in Jesus,*” recommitting ourselves in our daily labor to each do our part in building the Lord’s holy kingdom already to some extent here on earth.

Meanwhile, enjoy the picnics, fireworks, and mid-summer weather. Happy Independence Day!

~ Fr. Brian Beno
Dean, St. Paul’s Cathedral, Fond du Lac

July 11 ~ Proper 10

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Driving the streets in our cities, it's an all too common occurrence to see cross traffic blindly coast through their red lights without stopping to look before turning right. Less common, but a too frequent occurrence, is to see someone "run" a changing light, charging through the intersection while the cross traffic already has its green light. These are potentially very dangerous situations.

In this weekend's Collect, we pray that we may "*know and understand what things we ought to do.*" This is a prayer that we grow in maturity. In our youth we may "*know*" the difference between right and wrong because of what we've been taught. But then, as we grow into adulthood, we may challenge what we've been taught, but we usually come to a sense of "*understanding*" why rules are what they are – how they protect not only ourselves, but promote the safety and well-being of others for "the common good."

Still, it's one thing to "*know*" right from wrong, another to "*understand*" what things we ought to do (and not do), but with maturity we "*accomplish them.*" In other words, knowing and understanding are necessary steps in our coming to maturity, but knowing and understanding really don't matter unless we follow through and "do" the right thing.

But lest this be a reflection on our moral development, the difference, for us who follow Jesus, is our dependence on God's "grace."

So there it is: While driving this summer, consider our Collect. We ask God to grant that we may "*know*" and "*understand*" the "*things we ought to do,*" as we also pray for God's "*grace*" for "*the power faithfully to accomplish them*" – making good intentions reality; turning theory into practice; translating common sense into right living.

As someone observed: "Character is what we do when no one is watching." Still, when it comes to traffic safety, everyone needs to be watching. And as we live our faith in our daily lives, we owe it to ourselves and to others to give witness to our faith and Christian maturity by driving safely and courteously to God's honor and glory.

~ Fr. Brian Beno
Dean, St. Paul's Cathedral, Fond du Lac
City of FdL Police Chaplain for death notifications (including traffic fatalities)

July 18 ~ Proper 11

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

God knows, we don't. God can, we can't. These are the reasons that we make our prayer of humility today. This is why the first beatitude rings so true for me: "How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." When we truly recognize and accept our unworthiness and blindness, our spiritual poverty, we discover that we are already living in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Still, that is so much easier to say than to do. It is so difficult to "walk humbly with your God." It really isn't in the "American" character. Still, there are times in our lives that bring us down to our knees. As I look back over my life, I see so many moments of weakness, missed opportunity, and simple blindness. The healing of these painful memories is one of the necessities for which we trust our Lord.

Trust. That's really the point, isn't it? The "worthiness" of Jesus is in His never-failing love for us. For me. As I live this life in exile in a fallen world, I can trust in the compassion and mercy of Almighty God, because my Lord leads me to trust. He demonstrates that trust Himself. "Father: into Your hands I commend my spirit".

Everything I need for my life journey has already been provided. I'm still going to ask for my "daily bread," but my prayers will always be undependable, infrequent, and short-sighted. The answers will always be compassionate and merciful.

From Barlowgirl's meditation on Psalm 73:

*My God's enough for me. This world has nothing I need.
In this whole life I've seen my God's enough, enough for me.*

~ David Annis
St. Anne's, DePere

July 25 ~ Proper 12

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

When the Israelites returned to Jerusalem from their exile in Babylon, God had given them promises of a new life for following Him. “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways” (Is. 55:8). Following God is not easy, but He has given us The Bible as His roadmap to our survival during our time on this earth until we meet Him in the eternal life. In order to know God and His will for our lives, we need to seek Him and ask what He wants us to do. For me, some of the messages are very clear and some are cloudier. I know that when I put my trust in God and allow Him to be the one in charge, my life is much easier. I also know that I can’t do this on my own and that I need His help to do it. I also know that to know what He wants of me, I have to do the following:

- Read and study scripture and ask God to show me how I need to change so that I am able to show His love to all of those around me.
- As I take these scriptures and have God put them on my heart I am more able to be the messenger God wants me to be to help others.
- Through scripture I have learned that the only person I can change is myself, and I am commanded to just love others.
- As a sinner, I know that I have and will continue to make mistakes, but God in His great mercy will always forgive me, if I ask to be forgiven.
- As God has forgiven me, so I must forgive myself as well as others.
- When God has forgiven me or shown me something, I need to thank Him for His presence in my life.

As we all struggle along our faith journeys, we not only know that we have God walking along with us, but that we are mightily blessed with many other Christians who walk with us. We need to recognize them in our families, churches, communities and our diocese. For me, it is continually striving to build those relationships and to learn from each other. In our diocese I have been blessed with being involved in Cursillo, Women’s Ministries, and now with EfM. Each time I attend an EfM class, retreat, grouping, Ultreya or Cursillo weekend, God becomes more real to me and draws me closer to Him. I am always blessed with other people he sets in my path. It was not easy to take that first step of attending my first Cursillo weekend, but I am so thankful that I heard God’s voice calling my name and summoning me to a closer relationship with Him through good friends and my priest. I had to put aside my fears and step out in faith.

What is keeping you from that closer relationship with Our Lord and Savior? “I have called you by name, you are mine” (Is. 43:1)

~Barbara Drewry Zimmerman
St. Paul’s, Plymouth

August 1 ~ Proper 13

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 our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

“Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church.”

This Collect calls *mercy* God’s *cleanser*. Do we expect heavy duty scrubbing action? Do those gritty and abrasive cleansers that get sprinkled into sinks and bathtubs come to mind?

It is always good to think about what we are praying for when we use “*mercy*.” A little word study might suggest what kind of cleansing action we can expect from God’s mercy. In the New Testament the Greek word *eleos* is translated as “mercy” in English. In the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Bible of the New Testament Church, the Hebrew word *hesed* was translated as *eleos*. *Hesed* is usually translated in English as “steadfast love.”

Eleos shares the same root word as *elaion* which means “olive oil.” Olive oil brings two things to mind. 1. Olive oil was poured on wounds to soothe and to heal. It is like all the salves and creams that we put on burns and scrapes. It is used in the sacrament of anointing. 2. Olive oil was also used in anointing kings. Christ, the Messiah is the “anointed one.”

How does God *cleanse* His Church with *mercy*? He cleanses it with steadfast love. God cleanses His Church with His steadfast love, the love that heals with the soothing action of olive oil on its wounds and injuries. God the Son, the Christ, the Anointed One, comes. Love Itself comes loving and healing.

Too often we think of mercy as something a culprit begs from a judge. We think of mercy as letting a crook off easy. That is not God’s mercy. When we pray for God’s mercy we are praying for His healing love in our life, and we are praying that we too become that healing love cleansing the Church and the world.

~ Fr. Dean Einerson
Rector, St. Augustine, Rhinelander
Dean, Northwoods Deanery

August 8 ~ Proper 14

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

There is a quotation attributable to Vince Lombardi that goes something like this: "We will seek perfection. We will not find perfection, but in its pursuit we will find excellence." Today's Collect, asking for the spirit "*to think and do always those things that are right*" is not realistically a prayer for perfection, but a prayer for excellence.

One of the more common errors we make is to make a decision based on the facts as we know them, which turns out to be the wrong decision when unknown facts are subsequently revealed. This is a common and forgivable error, so long as a reasonably diligent effort has been made to ascertain all the relevant facts. If one is terrified about making a decision that later turns out wrong, one will delay making decisions until it is too late. The common term for this is "paralysis by analysis." A reasonably good decision is considerably better than a perfect one which is too late. If you are coming to a fork in the road and are unsure whether to go right or left, by all means do not go straight.

But on the other hand, we have known people whose motto is "ready, fire, aim." We need to pray for the patience that permits adequate deliberation before the trigger is pulled. This is particularly true in a crisis mode, when there is an urge to "do something." Perhaps we might consider resorting to a short prayer that will provide a moment of calm for necessary deliberation.

We will make mistakes. It is part of life. "Honest" mistakes can and must be forgiven. There is, however, an error of a more serious nature. It is deliberate error, doing something that you know is wrong. This may be minor and personal, such as having an extra helping of dessert. It may affect others, for instance, leaving too late for a meeting and driving recklessly trying to make up lost time, which puts others at risk. In its worst case, it is deliberately hurting others to advance your own agenda.

We can tell when we're doing this because we rationalize that the harm we cause others is "for their own good." It may be, sometimes. A child needs to be taught, in as severe a fashion as possible, not to run out into a busy street. In this case, we are inflicting some form of punishment for the good of the child, not for selfish reasons.

It is hurting others not for their sake but for yours that must be avoided. It may be denigrating the work of a fellow employee to increase the odds that you will get the bigger raise or the promotion. It may be parking in a handicapped space to save a few steps in the rain. There are many permutations.

It is when we are tempted to advance ourselves in some way by stepping on others that we need guidance. The guidance is not in knowing what is right and wrong. To invoke another Midwest icon, Garrison Keillor: On being asked by his mother "don't you know right from wrong," replied "knowing is not the hard part." The guidance is to not do wrong.

We are human. We will not "*think and do always those things that are right.*" But we can ask for help so that we do not do things that we know are wrong. And in this part of our life, we can "*live according to the Lord's will.*"

~ Jim Workman
St. Anne, DePere

August 15 ~ Proper 15

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of this redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*“ . . . and to **follow daily** in the blessed steps of his most holy life . . . ”*

Lord, most of the activities of my daily life seem so routine, so ordinary. I get up after hitting the snooze button several times. I get dressed, eat oatmeal, make sure my pets have food and water, and leave for work. At work I make the coffee, check e-mail, greet coworkers, work, then go home. Once I'm home I walk the dog, feed the pets, eat supper, wash dishes, read, go to bed, and fall asleep.

It's obvious that there's nothing spectacular about my daily life, and yet I need to make that connection between *what I do* and *who I am* as a follower of Jesus. In his daily life, Jesus showed us how to serve others. He reached out to young and old alike. By his words and his actions Jesus revealed God's love.

Perhaps the way I follow daily in Jesus' steps is to be aware of the opportunities I have to serve others throughout my day. Yes, I'm busy, but:

- When a coworker needs someone to deal with a computer problem . . .
I can stop what I'm doing and show her what to do.
- When a child in my class needs extra help . . .
I am patient and encouraging.
- When my neighbor wants to tell me about his surgery . . .
I listen.

Nothing dramatic, just ordinary ways of following Jesus by serving others.

Do others sometimes interrupt me? Sure, but I can put my plans on hold long enough to help. I imagine Jesus with all of the people who came to him; he was never too busy to give his attention to those who came to him.

Lord, let your love flow through every action, every thought, and every moment of my day. May I follow daily in your steps. May I serve others with love.

~ Jackie Schulz
St. Agnes, Butler

August 22 ~ Proper 16

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The old adage *There is strength in numbers* seems to apply to this week's Collect in which we ask that the Church, as a unified presence, may proclaim God's power throughout the world. Two words came to the forefront for me: *unity* and *power*. Although I have heard and prayed this Collect many times, I just now realize what a huge request we are making . . . UNITE the CHURCH??? Many of us can hardly imagine a united parish, a united Diocese, a united ECUSA, much less, the Church throughout the world. But it is, indeed, our request when we pray this prayer.

I tried tweaking the adage to say *There is strength in unity*. Perhaps we can see past our divisions when we consider why we are asking the Holy Spirit to make our hearts as one: we want the world to see the Church as a witness to God's power. And God's power can take many forms. It can be the powerful strength of the chastening God we see in the Old Testament, or the powerful love of the forgiving Christ of the New Testament. It can be manifest in a devastating tsunami or a gentle, quiet snow. It can be revealed in a moment of silent prayer, or in the uncontained joy of the First Mass of Easter. We feel the power of God at the first breath of life and at the last breath of life. WE know the power of God, be it awesome or comforting, tender or stern. But we, the church, can send a mixed message to the world if we cannot proclaim the message as ONE.

And so we ask God to unite His Church.

I think that the overwhelming message that the Church must proclaim *in unity* is that GOD IS LOVE. God loves each and all – in their weaknesses and in their strengths, in their joys and in their sorrows, in their righteousness and, yes, even in their sins. What a powerful message this is! Imagine the mom who has lost her job and hears that God is suffering with her in her trials and will provide for her in time of need. Imagine the criminal who hears that God has forgiven him and will lead him to a new life. Imagine each of us who sins in a time of weakness, but knows that God STILL loves us.

Now another saying comes to mind: *Talk is cheap*, or from the book of James: *Faith without works is dead*. Proclaiming this message of LOVE will not make much of an impact if we do not combine it with WORKS: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the sick . . . making ourselves become one with all of God's people in order to proclaim His power to the world.

~ Marianne Chadoir
Trinity, Oshkosh

August 29 ~ Proper 17

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Today's Collect is based on a prayer from one of the oldest liturgical manuscripts known to the church. For Anglicans, it has undergone several revisions through the ages all the way from the Sarum Missal, one of the precursors to the Book of Common Prayer, to the current American Prayer Book of 1979. While these changes have sought to reinterpret its true meaning and provide it to the contemporary reader, some of the hidden nuances may require a closer look.

While the insertion of the word "*true*" before religion may signal a church in conflict, the beautiful notion of us asking God to "*bring forth in us the fruit of good works*" clearly speaks of our metaphoric visual of God as the Great Gardener. We gather together as one, as a church in unity, not one that is fractured, and ask God to continue to bestow upon us His Grace that we might be nourished and encouraged and cared for in such a way that we may grow together, that we might be what and who it is that He calls us to be. Yes it is God who calls and we who answer, but without His continued Love and Grace we are nothing but the chaff that is thrown into the fire.

O Lord our God, bless us, guide us, and keep us we pray this day.

~ Fr. Nigel Bousfield
Rector, St. Mark's, Waupaca

September 5 ~ Labor Day

Almighty God, you have so linked our lives one with another that all we do affects, for good or ill, all other lives: So guide us in the work we do, that we may do it not for self alone, but for the common good; and, as we seek a proper return for our own labor, make us mindful of the rightful aspirations of other workers, and arouse our concern for those who are out of work; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

“A million here, a million there, pretty soon you're talking about real money.” That quote from Senator Everett Dirksen always crosses my mind when I catch the news reports about our economy's unemployment and job creation rates. It's a shock at first, then it fades to a mind-numbing dullness before becoming just another blip on the daily radar.

If we're employed, maybe we breathe a sigh of relief and say thanks to God for providing us with work. If we're unemployed it might be easy to look and say we're a mere statistic, no one sees me in the unemployed masses. If our work situations are unstable, we might see that number as a landslide coming downhill toward our families.

All of those reactions are natural. We need work and the income it produces to survive in this world. When our ability to work is threatened, we feel threatened, fearful, depressed and even cut off from the rest of the world as we cope with life. But, in each case, we're looking at our own circumstances, rather than looking to Jesus.

Jesus told His disciples: “No one can serve two masters, for either they will hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other.” The world of work forces that question on us as followers of Christ. Who or what will we love more? Will we be more satisfied in knowing that our lives are comfortable or in knowing Jesus. Will we be more satisfied in knowing God cares for us better than the birds of the air or will we only focus on providing for ourselves.

We are not statistics to God. His eyes do not roam over the world and see only bits of data that make up the billion here or billion there of all the people on earth. He sees us, loves us and cares for us as individuals. He calls us to Himself as our loving Father.

How will we respond to Him and to His people? If we're doing well, are we mindful of those who aren't both near and far? If we're not doing well, are we mindful that God will care for us. How can we be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in this world to each other no matter what our work situation is this Labor Day?

Father in heaven, help us to see not numbers but people. Give us strength to serve out of the resources you give to each of us. Teach us to depend on you and not our abilities, that we all may be one in you, through your Son Jesus Christ. Amen

~ Michael Scolare
St. Thomas, Menasha

September 12 ~ Proper 19

O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A Collect can be compared to a legal document that has a specific form for submission to court – in this case the highest court there is. There is an address to God, the judge; followed by the painful acknowledgement that “*without you we are not able to please you*” – in essence: the crime, the sin. We petition the court to “*mercifully grant*” the hope, the aspiration, that the “. . . *Holy Spirit may . . . direct and rule our hearts . . .*.” And we end with the pleading that the words will be heard “*through*” the only mediator, Christ. It appears that in a legal context a law has been violated “*without you we are not able to please you*” – and the sinner seeks implied forgiveness.

This Collect has been my recent cry in the midst of brokenness “*without you [God].*” It is the cry of a spirit longing to be accepted and loved. Consider this: the most important decision you will ever make is what you will do with God. That’s the situation that we all find ourselves in at some point in our lives. God has allowed us to make that choice, to make that journey. God is always ready and willing to receive us, whenever we finally decide to come to Him. He allows us to decide how we are going to respond. Pray that in our brokenness, the Spirit will open our hearts to God so that we can please Him.

O God of my heart, there is no need unknown to you, no bruise hidden, no tear unseen. I bargain with hopelessness. Renew me, O God, by your grace. Restore me, O God, to your truth. Renew my need for you, O God, and grant the courage to ask. Amen.

~ Dottie Rathjen
St. John the Baptist, Wausau

September 19 ~ Proper 20

Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Jane Carter, who was assigned to write this meditation, spent a recent month in Froedtert Hospital in Milwaukee. It appeared that a little thing like being hospitalized might prevent her from writing her assigned reflection! However, during one of my visits to her, she made the mistake of saying, "I'm bored." So, that's when I said to her, "Well then, let's brainstorm your Collect!" And here's what happened.

The Collect begins: "*Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things . . .*" Wow! What an opening thought for someone hospitalized! Not to be anxious. Jane had been anxious. She told me a story:

A few days earlier, she was taken from her room to a lab for some tests. She wears a cross on a chain around her neck. When she arrived at the lab, the technician said she'd have to remove her cross, but that it would be put in a plastic bag and attached to her chart.

On arriving back in her room, Jane didn't give it much thought; but later that day asked where her cross was? The nurses' desk on her floor didn't know. The lab people didn't know. It appeared to be lost somewhere in a huge hospital.

The next day, the nurse manager came to see her. Jane mentioned the cross. The nurse manager said "*she'd see what she could do*" – something she must say to patients fifty times a day. But later that day, a young man came to her room and asked if she was "Ms. Carter"? "Yes," she said. He said, "We have something for you." Her cross! They found it! It once was lost, but had been found!

Jane put it back on, and hasn't removed it since! She says that it reminds her of her connection to Jesus – even in the hospital. Jesus, in whose Name we pray: "*Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things.*"

Jane and I talked about it. Once it became separated from her chart, Jane had given up any hope that her little cross would ever be found. But it was. There's hope! There's that "abiding connection."

In that light, there's hope for the sick, there's hope for Jane. Her cross had been lost, but it was found. Kind of reminds one of that hymn we sing: "I once was lost, but now am found." So much for being "*anxious about earthly things . . .*" Jane thought that in a sense she lost her Lord, but he found her – even in that big hospital! Sometimes we feel lost to the Lord, but we are found – she and we are saved and loved by Jesus.

Her prayer was then the rest of the Collect: "*to hold fast to those (things) that shall endure.*" Then, as we prayed and she received the Lord in Holy Communion, it was abundantly clear that she would "*evermore dwell in him, and he in*" her (BCP 337).

And she thought she wasn't capable of offering us a reflection! Thank you, Jane. We're better for it! Get well!

(Fr. Brian Beno for)
~ Jane Carter
St. Paul's Cathedral, Fond du Lac

September 26 ~ Proper 21

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer defines “*Grace*” as “God’s favor towards us, unearned and undeserved. . . .” (BCP 858). How often have I asked God for His grace? Grace to say the right things to a grieving family; grace to write and deliver a meaningful sermon; grace to face my own trials? Sometimes it is a simple, “God give me the grace to . . .” Other times it is simpler: “God, help me.”

How often have you asked for His grace? What reply do we expect when we ask God for an outpouring of His grace, whatever the circumstance of our need?

There is a cartoon in a recent national magazine showing two men standing in front of and looking at a small mansion. One is saying to the other, “It’s more than I can afford and less than I desire.”

More than we can afford and less than we desire. Is that God’s answer to our plea for grace? We may think so. Certainly, His grace is always *more than we can afford*. It is His favor in excess of anything we could purchase – it is free to us, having been purchased by His Son.

But, it is often *less than we want*. Oh, it is sufficient; entirely sufficient. But, it is not as much as we would like. The fullness of His grace does not mean more than we need. Rather, it is just what we need, in every sense of the word, “just.”

A modern mystery writer has one of his characters, a young boy, saying, “A grace is a thing you get from God, you use it to make a better world, or not use it, you have to choose.” I rather like that definition. It places the emphasis upon what the grace is for, not upon our felt need. It also makes it plain that God’s grace is for us to use, but the choice to do so is ours. God always gives us a choice, doesn’t he?

The Ven. Dr. Ed Smith,
Archdeacon, Diocese of Fond du Lac

October 3 ~ Proper 22

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Have you ever been in the midst of a big Italian family sharing a meal? Just inhale the fragrance of tomato sauce with basil. Breathe in the scent of freshly baked bread. Experience the warm welcoming mother hovering and smothering. "Mange! Mange!" Eat! Eat!

Feast! Fill your stomachs, fill your loneliness, fill your emptiness. Come, all are welcome. Bring your friends. We are in the living out of a psalm verse, participating as brothers and sisters dwelling in unity. And indeed, it is very good.

A song refrain enters my mind:

"Come, just as you are to worship,
Come, just as you are before your God:
Come."

At His banquet are found in great abundance gifts of mercy, forgiveness, generosity, and love. I am invited to share in this great bounty, but I hold back, I do not go in. I am offered a plethora of presents, but I refuse to accept them.

My guilt, unworthiness, and secret sins create false barriers. I choose not to risk coming into this banquet.

In this week's beautiful Collect, Jesus, like the mother of her large family, lovingly beckons. He tells my wavering heart I am here for you, even when you don't come in. I have much to give to you and share with you, even when you are not open to My gifts. I am aware of those things of which your conscience is afraid – I took them all with me to the Cross. My dear child, accept my forgiveness. Let Me pour out upon you all the good things I have prepared for you. Come, just as you are. Come, feast at my table.

Come.

~ Mary Lea Jones
Blessed Sacrament, Green Bay

October 10 ~ Proper 23

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

If the Holy One of Heaven will give us grace, then we will do good works.

When we “pass it on” or do a good work for no reason, is it God’s grace that gave us the idea to do this? In this Collect, we are asking God to lead us with grace and to follow us with grace that we might do good works.

We aren’t asking God to show us the good works that need to be done, but we are assuming that God will give us a nudge when something comes along that we could help with. Often times we ignore that nudge or wonder what in the earth it is. We don’t always notice that unusual idea that pops into our mind. Often we just push it away and say, ‘not now.’

Try to recognize when a thought comes into your mind that you might be able to help with such and such. You might not usually think of this, so maybe it has another source. Listen to it and give it a few thoughts. Just maybe, this is the grace that we often ask for; to show us where to walk, and where our help and strength may be needed.

~ Barb Milligan
St. Paul’s Cathedral, Fond du Lac

October 17 ~ Proper 24

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

As one who has lived in several countries and closely follows developments in the global church, I can testify to the fact that in Christ, God has indeed revealed his glory among the nations. In many countries of the world the church as an institution and Christians as individuals are positively influencing such areas as education, healthcare, economic development, political discourse, justice and human rights issues, etc. In Kenya, for example, a graduate from a Christian college has a much higher chance of being hired even by non-Christian employers because they believe Christians have a higher level of integrity.

Unfortunately, Christian politicians and church leaders are not immune from the diseases of corruption, repression, and war mongering. That's why it is fitting that "requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority" (*1 Timothy 2:1-3*). The challenge is that "everyone" refers to the whole world, even our distant enemies. For in Christ, those who once were far away have been brought near; having destroyed the dividing wall of hostility (*Ephesians 2:13-22*).

Even as we pray that God would *preserve the works of his mercy*, and for the church to *persevere with steadfast faith*, may we be reminded that we are the light and salt of the world, called to preserve it from decay. May our lights so shine that the world may see our good deeds and glorify our Father in Heaven (*Matthew 5:13-16*).

~ Fr. Samuel Nsengiyumva
Rector, St. Peter's, Sheboygan Falls
Dean, Lake Winnebago Deanery

October 24 ~ Proper 25

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

At first reading, this appears to be an easy one. Just give me more faith, hope and charity and make me love what God commands me to do in order to get what he has promised.

But on closer examination, the details begin to make me wonder if *I* can increase my faith, my hope, or my charity. How can I, when faced with some overwhelming personal pain, continue to hold on? How can a family tragedy make me stronger in my faith? How can *I* grow more hopeful when I lose my job and can't pay the rent? Will *I* be more charitable or loving when someone intentionally hurts me, my family, or my friends, or will *I* be tempted to strike back?

My goal is to learn to think gratefully of everything, good and bad, that happens as an opportunity to say "your will be done."

I know in my life, when something bad or new happens, I have said I don't think I can get through this. But, at that moment of despair or doubt, something happens if I let it. Somehow, from somewhere, I get the strength to get up, to step into the unknown, to go on. I know that I am never alone. God is with me always. Sometimes Christ takes my hand and leads me. Sometimes he helps me get up and go on. And, sometimes I just lean on him, listen, and breathe in. I will find out how to seek what it is I am called to do, to be.

Trusting. Forgiving. Being mindful. All those things we have been taught. I know I am not alone, not forsaken. I only need to ask. My most often said daily prayer is this: Please help me, Lord. I don't think I can do this by myself. I need your help. Amen.

~ Carol Feller Gottard
St. Ambrose, Antigo

October 31 ~ All Saints' Day

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

“What is a saint?” asked a teacher of her second grade Sunday School class. “A saint is someone who lets the light shine through” replied a precocious student. As it turned out, this young Christian had toured the cathedrals of England with her parents. When asked the question she remembered all the beautiful stained glass windows she had seen; many of which had depicted the figure of a famous saint of old bathed in colorful array as the sun shone through the leaded glass figure.

Jesus said to His followers: “You are the light of the world” (*Matthew 5:14*). He also said: “I am the light of the world” (*John. 9:15*). All Saints’ Day is the day we celebrate the Light of Christ lived out in all those who have been born anew by the grace of God; those who have let the light of Christ shine through in their daily walk among us – mothers and fathers who stayed faithful to each other and their families, single women and single men who exuded the light of Christ in their lives by what they did and said, those who found God through the pain they suffered, those who would never have thought of themselves as holy but whose Christ-likeness was clear to those close to them.

There are many in this world who “look on the bright side of things.” They present an upbeat attitude that is contagious and brings cheerfulness to any gathering. Is this an attitude that is developed in their own strength? Or is it from God? The light of Christ is far more edifying than that exhibited by human effort. The light of Christ brings energy and power to transform our lives and those to whom we witness. It is the light given to us as Jesus frees us from sin, heals us of the scars and wounds of the past, and removes the bondages and barriers that separate us from union with Him. As we let go of these obstacles and allow God to baptize us in His Holy Spirit we will see the Light. We will be bearers of that Light – light that dispels the darkness of our souls and those to whom we minister. When this happens, then we will have fulfilled the bidding of Our Blessed Lord Jesus Who said: “Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in heaven” (*Matthew 5:16*).

~ Fr. Ken Okkerse
All Saints Chapel, Elkhart Lake

November 7 ~ Proper 27

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Many years ago, when I was a Boy Scout on a camping trip with my troop (Troop 76 - Hope Lutheran Church), we were required to purify drinking water from a stream. The results of our activity would teach us the approved survival technique for purification, and give us the necessary points toward a certain merit badge. This process does not sound too difficult; but to boys ranging in age from 9 to 12 years, it proved to be tedious.

The water must be filtered (a T-shirt works nicely) since minnows, tadpoles, and mud are unnecessary, and then the water is boiled for a specified period of time. We had to wait for the water to cool a bit because our next step required us to “aerate” the water. This is accomplished by pouring the water between two containers, allowing additional cooling and the “entrainment” of oxygen. It is the oxygen trapped in water that gives it “taste” otherwise the water tastes “flat.” Of course we made a few mistakes (pouring hot water on each other), but eventually we learned the “art” and science of water purification.

There are some people who profess that the experiences we have in life are part of the “purification” process that God puts us through. It seems to me that many of us may be able to relate our earthly existence to this act of water purification. We all have experienced many things that have altered our view of life and perhaps even our attitude about our Creator.

I have felt (at times) as if I was being passed through some sort of a “filter,” and had experiences that caused my emotions to be “elevated” to unthinkable temperatures. I would wager that many of you can relate to such imagery. How many of us have endured physical and emotional journeys that (curiously enough) resemble the “aeration” process? In the end did we end up feeling “purified?” Perhaps not, and I cannot say that I have any confidence in this rigorous and arbitrary process of life being a “purifier.” I must hope that my responses to such extreme stimuli were compatible with Christ’s expectations. Being a fallible creature, I know that too often I have failed to measure up to Jesus’ expectations.

I can only place my hope in the words of the “Thanksgiving over the Water” used at celebrations of Holy Baptism (BCP 307). The priest invokes the Holy Spirit and prays: “Now sanctify this water, we pray you, by the power of your Holy Spirit, that those who here are cleansed from sin and born again may continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior.” I have to trust in the words of my Church and what few “good things” I may have done (with Christ’s help) and may continue to do for others. I must make a continuous and conscious effort to live as close to Christ’s expectations as I can.

I am not sure that I can purify myself; I believe I am unable to do so. Therefore, I can only hope that Jesus will be my “purifier,” have pity on me, and take me as I am – minnows, tadpoles, mud, and all.

~ Deacon Michael Hackbarth
St. Paul’s Cathedral, Fond du Lac

November 14 ~ Proper 28

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.

When I was in college, there was a teenager in the youth group who juggled. He did all the tricks with little or no effort. “Wow, I wish I could do that!” I told him. “I wish I could play the guitar” he responded. I played the guitar so we struck a deal. I’d give him basic guitar lessons if he’d give me basic juggling lessons.

I learned basic juggling, and to this day can keep a basic pattern with three balls in the air for about a minute before I lose control. Cool skill, but one I didn’t really do much with. I never worked out other patterns, or multiple balls, or even different objects. I use this skill every once in awhile to get a “Wow” from those who watch, but that’s about it.

For many, Scripture is like my juggling: get the basics down (like the books of the Bible), and pull it out every once in awhile to get a “Wow.” Many people fail to go beyond the rudimentary elements.

Today’s Collect reminds us that we need to do more than just a basic pattern with Scripture. We should learn multiple patterns (like how do the Synoptic Gospels interplay with each other), with multiple balls (like how do various translations relate to each other), and even different objects (like what do others say about Scripture). Of course this doesn’t just happen: it takes effort on our part.

So why not juggle today?

~ Lay Canon Matthew P. Payne
Husband of Maggie, father of Andrew (22, USMC), Nicholas (13), and Gillian (11)
St. Thomas, Menasha
Diocesan Administrator

November 21 ~ Proper 29

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

When I was enticed to write this page in our Devotional Booklet, Fr. Brian told that I could have “the last word.” My wife would have the first word (*see May 30 ~ Trinity Sunday*), but I could have the last word. And what husband doesn’t want that? So, is this really the last word? I ask, because it doesn’t look to be the last of anything!

The Scriptures and the Creeds agree. St. Paul says: “Then comes the end, when he [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all” (*1 Corinthians 15:24, 28*). And we say in the Nicene Creed: “his kingdom will have no end.” We believe that Jesus Christ is our ruler and Lord, and we pray for His rule to be realized among us each time we pray: “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.”

But we aren’t there yet, are we? We haven’t reached the end. We haven’t heard the last word yet. How we long for the time when all the earth’s peoples will be freed from everything that enslaves us – liberated to serve God and all God’s people in peace and harmony!

Once I had a funeral for a truly devout lady of the Episcopal Church, a convinced and happy Christian, who was married to a Jew. One of her sons was a Christian, and the other was a Jew. At her funeral I said that Christians share with others the hope that one day we will see that we are all children of one heavenly Father and that no differences can erase our common humanity. When will we see that we are all children under one God? That day hasn’t come yet.

It makes me sad that we haven’t arrived. It makes me happy that we haven’t arrived. I’d like to enjoy the fruits of God’s kingdom as much as anyone, but the time hasn’t come for us to relax from our prayers and good works. There are still important contributions to make to God’s work in *this* world. With our prayers and works, we can advance the cause of human unity. We can advance the possibility that peace will come. We can advance the harmony that God wants us to enjoy fully in the kingdom only God can bring.

Then *God* can have and say “the last word!”

~ Fr. Steve Powers
Rector, Trinity, Oshkosh