

I think you know by now that occasionally I like to take a look at the Collect, that is, the Opening Prayer of the Mass, especially these Sunday collects which we repeat on the ferial days of the week.

Let me quote the prayer again, in case it has slipped your mind.

“O God, who cause the minds of the faithful to unite in a single purpose, grant your people to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, amid the uncertainties of this world, our hearts may be fixed on that place where true gladness is found.”

The prayer is an ancient one. It is found word-for-word with the current Latin Missal in the Gelasian Sacramentary – a Missal put together around 750 AD. Of course, the prayers in it are older than the Missal itself. Perhaps it does in fact come from the pen of Pope Gelasius himself: a prolific writer and composer of prayers, who was Pope just at the end of the 5th century. This would make our prayer just on 1,500 years old.

The fundamental idea of the prayer is the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel: where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (cf. Mt 6: 21) We may ask ourselves: where is my treasure? What is my heart fixed on?

The collect prays that our hearts may be fixed on true gladness, and not on the uncertain diversions of this changing world. And yet, to reach that final goal of eternal happiness, we have to live in this passing world. There’s no escaping that!

Yes, only God is unchanging, only God is utterly reliable: so we must learn to love what God commands as we desire what he promises.

The Latin here is rather particular. It uses the words *id* and *quod*, which is really to say, “love *the thing* which you command ... desire *the thing* which you promise”. In other words, love and desire God’s will in the concrete: not just in the abstract, dreamily, but in the daily details of living, perhaps especially when those details are little to our liking. We must love God in this annoying beggar at the door, this irritating member of the community – not just beggars and brothers in general or in abstraction. We must love Him in this chore to be done, this essay to write, this homily to prepare. It isn’t always easy, which is, I suppose, why Pope Gelasius thought we had better pray for the grace to be able to do it!

Martin Wallace OP
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