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This morning's Collect is interesting to consider as our lessons for the rest of this season move us toward considering our Christian Duty. The first thing that we might appreciate about this Collect, is that it is so short! This is a sign though that this Collect and these lessons for today are much older than our prayerbooks. Thomas Cranmer and those who came after him to revise the Prayerbook retained many of the old Latin Collects and Lessons, which means that since about 680 AD the Church has read these prayers and this Epistle and Gospel on this 19th Trinity Sunday. But what is most interesting is the wisdom and theology that has been distilled into this prayer this morning, and how it helps us to think about the lessons we have heard.

We begin our prayer with the uncomfortable reminder of *O God, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee*. At first sight, this might seem like circular reasoning, in which one might ask, can we only please God through God's power? But this is one of the points that the lessons for this morning makes. We are completely and totally dependent on God for everything, which even though this is the truth to be learned from Christ, yet this is counter cultural to a world which prizes "I did it my way" and pulling one up by one's bootstraps. The Collect reveals to us that we are more like those *other Gentiles* from the Epistle, *who walk in the vanity of their mind, having their understanding darkened*, and even more like the man *sick of the palsy* from the Gospel, than we care to admit or realize. This is the truth about our natural condition, we are so desperate that we cannot please God without His helping us to do so, and so it follows that those who are not praying for the power to please God are not pleasing Him.

But before we throw up our hands in desperation and ask why even bother, we are reminded that God would have us to recognize this valuable truth because He has something better in mind. For God does not intend for us to know that we cannot please God without His own help so that we can be spiritually depressed. He would have us to know this so that we may know how much we need the Holy Spirit to direct

and rule our hearts, and so the last line of the collect is *Mercifully grant that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord*. But again, we might be a little bit uncomfortable with the request to *direct and rule our hearts*. Some would rather *direct and rule their own hearts*. But before we are tempted to go down the rabbit hole of free will, we should remember that God does not intend to make us into robots. To allow the Holy Spirit to direct and rule our hearts is not at all about free will or predestination, or losing our personal identity, but about our renewal and redemption.

For this reason, we are presented with two examples of our need for renewal. In the Epistle we are shown what happens when man misses the true conception of the object and meaning of life. The mind becomes prey to delusions, and the understanding is darkened. From the mind, sin passes to the heart, and men become not only unfamiliar with God, but estranged from Him. Sin is no longer felt as pain, for the conscience has become calloused. All the restraints of wholesome religion are gone as men plunge greedily into every unhallowed thing. Let us remember that this does not always happen dramatically, but gradually. We know that losing faith can be gradual without losing all that faith has taught at once.

This is the very different picture of those in whom renewal has begun. By allowing the Holy Spirit to direct and rule their hearts, they have come under a new influence. They have “learned Christ” as the example to which their lives are to be conformed. They have been taught in Christ’s school, and learned the lesson He teaches even Himself as the truth, for “truth is in Jesus,” and both teacher and lesson are personal. They have received a new nature which is to conquer their old nature and character. St. Paul teaches us that at our baptisms *ye did put off... the old Man... ye are being renewed in the Spirit,* “*ye did put on the New Man*. In any case the passage teaches that the day we were baptized is not just a checked box but made us partakers in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, members of His Church, and heirs of the Kingdom of God. St. Paul goes even further and reminds us that Baptism

is a process, it is something that we will hopefully grow into, that it is completed by entire renewal in the spirit of the heart and mind. Holiness is not a super power but can only proceed from a renewed nature.

This renewal must reflect the inward life shining through our outward life. We must put off our habitual sins and distractions. We must put off dishonesty, sinful anger, evil language, unloving tempers, unchastity and gluttony, and put on the virtues of Christ. We must learn our need and prove our sincerity by breaking through every hindrance of prejudice, and pride, till we reach the feet of Christ, Who alone is the Lord of every disease, and among the rest, of palsy, who alone can cure the palsied conscience, affections, understanding, and will. We long for renewal in the Church, in our work, in our families and in our lives, but we must not forget that before any renewal can happen, we must seek the forgiveness of sins, we must avail ourselves to baptism, confession and Holy Communion and allow them to be vehicles of God's grace in our lives. Fr. Austin Farrer, the Anglican priest and theologian reminds us that *Jesus by his own death is the forgiveness of our sins; he is the resurrection and the life through his own resurrection.* [Through His sacraments] *We are thrown into the life-giving sepulchre of Christ, we touch the slain and living Christ, his body and his blood; our sins are forgiven us, and we live by him; we arise to walk in all those good works that he has prepared for us to walk in. Amen.*