

WEEK 9 “Guide the people” FOR AN ELECTION, Book of Common Prayer, p. 822

OPENING INVITATION *Read aloud the prayer slowly. After a time of silence each person identifies a word or phrase that catches your attention.*

Almighty God, to whom we must account for all our powers and privileges: Guide the people of the United States (or of this community) in the election of officials and representatives; that, by faithful administration and wise laws, the rights of all may be protected and our nation be enabled to fulfill your purposes; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

If technology and time permit, watch the accompanying video.

CONTEXT & HISTORY OF THE COLLECT *Take a few minutes to discuss the context of the prayer.*

Several years ago I was asked to pray at a luncheon featuring former secretary of state, James Baker, as the speaker. When I sat down, Secretary Baker said, “Father, that was the best...and shortest...of any prayer I have ever heard.” I replied that it was from the Prayer Book and that he might find similar ones beginning on page 814.

There are some wonderful prayers in our tradition that we seldom realize are even there. Have your group ‘thumb through’ that section and have them identify prayers of particular meaning to each.

How does the context affect your understanding of the collect?

After allowing each person to share, take a moment in prayer and ask God to speak through the Word. Then read the collect again, together aloud, slowly. Now, let each person read over the collect silently while being on the lookout for three things to notice and perhaps share:

	Light bulb: This should be something that ‘shines’ from the passage—whatever impacts most or draws your attention.
	Question mark: Anything that is difficult to understand in the collect or a question that may be raised as a result.
	Arrow: A personal application from your life.

SCRIPTURE *Read aloud and consider these scriptural verses as they relate to the collect.*

I Samuel 8. In many ways, Samuel’s prophetic life is largely ignored in the Hebrew Scriptures. He is a figure of immense importance, however, and his mother’s “song” prefigured the *Magnificat*. If I were rewriting the Biblical story of the Jews, I would begin with this text. There is no turning back for the Jews after this.

Why was Samuel opposed to the Israelites having a king “just as do the other peoples of the earth”?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION *These questions are only suggestions. Use one, all, or none. Create your own questions; let the group decide where the conversation might go.*

To think about:

It is common in most parishes to pray by name for the president of the United States as well as other elected officials. Many years ago I had a friend, an Episcopal priest, who would not pray for then Alabama governor, George Wallace. When I questioned the appropriateness of his refusal, he readily admitted to his shortcomings. He made no attempt to defend himself. Nevertheless, he would not so pray.

For discussion:

1. What would have been your response to your priest for such a refusal?
2. Have there been those in/running for public service for whom you could not pray?
3. Should clergy be allowed to express their political views and in what context?
4. Most public office holders, particularly in our part of the world, openly practice their faith. To what degree should public officials' civic duties reflect personal religious values?

CLOSING *Pray the collect together as a group.*

Almighty God, to whom we must account for all our powers and privileges: Guide the people of the United States (or of this community) in the election of officials and representatives; that, by faithful administration and wise laws, the rights of all may be protected and our nation be enabled to fulfill your purposes; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

A CONCLUDING POSTSCRIPT:

In his "Letters and Papers from Prison," Bonhoeffer says the following: "...the world is controlled by forces against which reason is powerless."

And...

"We have spent too much time thinking, supposing that if we weigh every possibility in advance everything will somehow happen automatically. We have learnt a bit too late in the day that action springs not from thought, but from responsibility."

Homework:

It is the responsibility of every citizen to vote your conscience. When you go to the polls, pray beforehand...in fact, take the Prayer for an Election with you.

AND VOTE!