

Dear Friend

I was privileged to lead Choral Matins at St Mary's Farleigh yesterday and I preached on Psalm 63 which was sung to a chant by the whole congregation – all 13 of us! I took the opportunity to include some information on Myles Coverdale who translated the version of the Psalms in the Parish Psalter from which we sang. I now find that today I can reflect on the life of another contributor to our wonderful heritage of Services but also to the English language.

Today is the day when we commemorate the life of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. He was born in Aslockton in Nottinghamshire, in 1489, and was educated at Jesus College, Cambridge. He became a Fellow and was ordained in 1523, receiving his doctorate in divinity in 1526.

As a Cambridge Don Cranmer came to the King's notice in 1529 when he was investigating ways forward in the matter of the proposed royal divorce. His rise was rapid and he was appointed Archdeacon of Taunton, made a Royal Chaplain, and given a post in the household of Sir Thomas Boleyn, father of Anne. In 1530 Cranmer accompanied Boleyn on an embassy to Rome and in 1532 he himself became ambassador to the court of the Emperor Charles V. His divergence from traditional orthodoxy was already apparent by his marriage to a niece of the Lutheran theologian Osiander despite the rule of clerical celibacy.

Returning to England to become Archbishop of Canterbury, he was in a dangerous position. Henry VIII was fickle and capricious and Cranmer was fortunate to survive where many did not. Yet Henry seemed to have a genuine affection for his honest but hesitant archbishop, even if he did (apparently in jest) describe him as the 'greatest heretic in Kent' in 1543. Four years later Henry died with Cranmer at his bedside and during the brief reign of Edward VI the Archbishop now had an opportunity to put into practice his reform of the English Church.

He edited the *Homilies* (1547) and wrote those on salvation, good works, faith, and the reading of Scripture. He compiled the two Prayer Books of 1549 and 1552, and wrote the original 42 Articles of Religion (1552). But the young king's death brought Cranmer's phase of the English Reformation to a premature end. He was imprisoned first in the Tower then in the Bocardo prison in Oxford. Under great physical and mental pressure, he several times recanted of his deviations from Roman doctrine. But at the last he re-found his courage and repudiated all his recantations before he was burned at the stake on 21 March 1556.

In later years it would become apparent that the seed Cranmer had sown had taken deep root and his 1552 Prayer Book (as amended in 1559 and 1662) clearly demonstrated his gift for both rhythmical fluency and memorable phrase. It was to become a lasting treasure of the English language and Cranmer's principle of liturgical worship in contemporary English has become a defining element of the Anglican Church.

(Extract from *Saints on Earth: A biographical companion to Common Worship* by John H Darch and Stuart K Burns)

So let us now pray the Collect for today:

Father of all mercies,
who through the work of your servant Thomas Cranmer
renewed the worship of your Church
and through his death revealed your strength in human weakness:
by your grace strengthen us to worship you
in spirit and in truth
and so to come to the joys of your everlasting kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Mediator and Advocate,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.