

19th September 2025

Clean

**“And six little Singing-boys – dear little souls –
In nice clean faces, and nice white stoles.”**

R H Barham, *The Ingoldsby Legends* (1840)

I remember my granny referring to the tap in the kitchen sink as “the wall” – with the “a” sounding as in *bat* rather than in *ball*. It was clear enough, even at a young age, where this came from. My granny, as a child, didn’t have running water at home. No taps, and no sink. Instead, water had to be drawn from “the well” outside, hence the continued use of the Scots dialect word to describe any place from which water can be fetched.

But I was *completely* flummoxed when she referred to the kitchen sink as the *jawbox*. What on earth was this, and where could that name possibly have come from? *Jawbox*, I’ve discovered since, is a slang name for what we would now call “a Belfast sink”, a deep sink used to clean everything: from dishes, through clothes on a washboard, to babies and toddlers. Indeed, I can recall myself being washed, standing up, in such a kitchen sink when I was small. The name itself comes from a combination of “jaw”, to pour, throw out, or splash, and “box” for ... well ... a box! So, *jawbox* for my granny was a place where everything got cleaned.

“Cleanliness is next to Godliness,” my granny was fond of saying. “We maun be puir, but we can aye be clean”, she would sometimes add. So, cleanliness mattered, and the *jawbox* was well used.

In the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, there is this petition to God:

*Make me a clean heart, O God;
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence:
and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.
O give me the comfort of thy help again:
and stablish me with thy free spirit.*

While the language and style may be archaic, doesn’t the meaning still stand? Isn’t an inner cleansing important, a time to review, take stock, confess, or recognise a personal failing? Doesn’t taking time to do some personal, *internal* cleaning matter too? Might prayer, meditation, mindfulness, silence, or contemplation be the spiritual *jawbox* we need?

A prayer for today

Make me a clean heart, O God.

I’m in your jawbox, ready for a good washing. Amen