



Episode 14: What is the Collect?

SUMMARY

“Collect” is the official term for what is generally known as the Opening Prayer of the Mass. This term is significant because it suggests how we ought to approach the opening oration.

The prayer is preceded by the invitation of the priest: “Let us pray.” Note that these words do not mean “Bring me the book,” or “Please stand,” or “Watch while I turn through the pages,” or even “Listen to this prayer.” The invitation means first and foremost “Let us formulate the intentions we want to offer at this Mass.”

In silence, the entire assembly is joined in prayer. The Collect gathers these silent prayers. At the Preparation of the Offerings, let the silence be an opportunity for each to say, “Lord, I offer myself to you, completely and entirely.” After Holy Communion, let it be “O Lord, thank you for this great gift of yourself; unite me to yourself.” In the end, every participant in the Mass should learn to pray in the silence. This single effort could totally change our experience of the Mass.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

The prayers addressed to God by the priest who presides over the assembly in the person of Christ are said in the name of the entire holy people and of all present. [...] Thus not only when things are read “which were written for our instruction” (Rom. 15:4), but also when the Church prays or sings or acts, the faith of those taking part is nourished and their minds are raised to God, so that they may offer Him their rational service and more abundantly receive His grace. (n°. 33)

Roman Missal

Next the Priest calls upon the people to pray and everybody, together with the Priest, observes a brief silence so that they may become aware of being in God’s presence and may call to mind their intentions. Then the Priest pronounces the prayer usually called the “Collect” and through which the character of the celebration finds expression. By an ancient tradition of the Church, the Collect prayer is usually addressed to God the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

General Instruction, n°. 54

The Priest then calls upon the people to pray, saying, with hands joined, *Let us pray*. All pray silently with the Priest for a brief time. Then the Priest, with hands extended, says the Collect, at the end of which the people acclaim, *Amen*.

General Instruction, n°. 127

IN THE TRADITION

“Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves [...] and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation.”

St. Justin Martyr
Apology, I, 65

“When he who is to ‘collect’ the prayer rises from the ground, they all stand up at once, [...] lest it should be thought that he has offered his own prayer independently instead of following the leader to the close.”

St. John Cassian
Institutes, Book II, Chapter 7

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

✠ ‘In the name of the whole Church’ does not mean that priests are the delegates of the community. The prayer and offering of the Church are inseparable from the prayer and offering of Christ, her head; it is always the case that Christ worships in and through his Church. The whole Church, the Body of Christ, prays and offers herself ‘through him, with him, in him,’ in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to God the Father. The whole Body, *caput et membra*, prays and offers itself, and therefore those who in the Body are especially his ministers are called ministers not only of

Christ, but also of the Church. It is because the ministerial priesthood represents Christ that it can represent the Church.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 1553

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Attend to the pleas of your people with heavenly care,
O Lord, we pray,
that they may see what must be done and gain strength to do what they have seen. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can we be more disciplined in our participation at Mass so that we mean what we say?
2. What are the recurring concerns you like to bring to prayer during the Mass?
3. The Collects first address God, then they present a petition. What connection can you make between this prayer and yours?

FOR FURTHER READING

- James G. Leachman, osb and Daniel P. McCarthy, osb, *Appreciating the Collect: An Irenic Methodology*, (Farnborough, Hampshire: St. Michael’s Abbey Press, 2008).
- Lauren Pristas, *The Collects of the Roman Missals of 1962 and 2002: A Comparative Study of the Sundays in Proper Seasons before and after the Second Vatican Council*, (London; New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013).