



Fr. Daniel's Corner

Mass Moment: Part 8

The Opening Prayer: Collect

At the close of this first part of the Mass (the Introductory rite) the priest will ask us to join our minds in prayer when he says "Let us pray." This prayer is called the "Collect"- through it the character of the celebration finds expression. The purpose is to *collect*, into a few short lines, all the strands of what has taken place so far, as well as all the strands of our many individual thoughts, which come from many directions here at the beginning of our prayer. So this collect effectively places us all together into one succinctly expressed address to God the Father. Historically, this title recalls the old custom of Rome where, about the fourth century, it was the practice for the whole community to gather in one church so that they might proceed with solemnity to the temple chosen for the celebration of the day's Mass. In this second sense, the Collect is the prayer of the *plebs collecta*, the prayer of the assembled people.

In the *Collect*, God is first addressed, using one or more of His many titles. Thus, "Almighty and Everlasting God," or something similar. Next we *remember* before God what God has done- certainly not because He has forgotten, but because *remembering* is from biblical times a fundamental form of prayer. It is our way of acknowledging what He has done on our behalf. Next, on the basis of what is remembered, we ask for something in the present, for ourselves and for the whole Church and world, which is assembled in our assembling. When we remember what God has done in the past, we have courage and reason to hope for what we ask for in the present. If it is a feast, what we remember before God in the prayer is the particular saving event that is the subject of the feast. Something similar is awakened in the liturgical seasons. On Sundays in Ordinary Time, some more generally formulated saving action of God is recalled, but it is always an event remembered that becomes the basis of petition.

In general, we ask that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ our Lord; that God may free us from sin and bring us the joy that lasts for ever; that he may give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do His work on earth, that "unhindered in mind and body alike, we may pursue in freedom of heart the things that are yours." (Roman Missal, see 32nd week Ordinary Time). We may also ask for our personal needs, material and spiritual. However, at this moment, we should go beyond our personal concerns and ask for as many crowns as those who enter the combat of Christian life. Our prayer to God the Father will then be not merely an individual petition but an expression and fulfillment of the unity of the faithful gathered through Christ in the Holy Spirit. We ask God to watch over his chosen family; to give undying life to all who have been born again in baptism, "O God, who by the abundance of your grace give increase to the peoples who believe in you, look with favor on those you have chosen and clothe with blessed immortality those reborn through the Sacrament of Baptism." (Roman Missal, see Easter Saturday); Or we ask, "O God, ... sanctify your whole Church in every people and nation, pour out, we pray, the gifts of the Holy Spirit across the face of the earth and, with the divine grace that was at work when the Gospel was first proclaimed, fill now once more the hearts of believers" (Roman Missal, see Pentecost).

The Opening Prayer ends with the word "*Amen*." We make the prayer our own and give our assent by this acclamation. Its translation could be: "Truly be so!" or "So be it!" or "Be it done so!" *Amen* is the last word of the New Testament: It closes the Revelation. *Amen* is truly the last word in all prayer. It is the last word, too, in holiness, which is man's perfect adherence to the will of God. It is to say, "As you wish," "My Lord and my God: into your hands I abandon the past and the present and the future, what is small and what is great, what amounts to a little and what amounts to a lot, things temporal and things eternal." (St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, *The Way of the Cross*, p.68). I say *Amen* to all that you ask of me. With that *Amen*, therefore, we acknowledge sincerely our total dependence on God. It is only fitting that we exert the effort to pronounce it decisively. In doing so, we will be happy to hear through the veil of our faith what the Lord told Moses: "This request, too, which you have just made, I will carry out, because you have found favor with me and you are my intimate friend" (Ex 33:17). "We have this confidence in God: that he hears us whenever we ask for anything according to his will" (1 Jn 5:14).

And that is your Mass Moment for the week.