

“FOUR-FOR-FOUR”
CATECHESIS ON THE *ROMAN MISSAL*

Introductory Rites: Collect (December 4–5, 2010)

You’ll remember that the purpose of the **Introductory Rites** is to gather the Church—a word that means “assembly”—for the celebration of Mass.

Today we’re going to focus on the **Collect** or Opening Prayer, which concludes the Introductory Rites.

As the name “Collect” implies, the purpose of this rite is to gather the individual intentions of all present into a single prayer of the whole Church.

This is a concrete illustration of St. Paul’s teaching:

“As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ” (1 Cor 12:12).

The Collect reminds us that ultimately, we offer our individual lives in union with the Sacrifice of Christ.

Our sacrifice, the Sacrifice of Christ, and the Sacrifice of the Church become one thing.

Therefore we come to Mass to not only for ourselves, but also for the rest of the Church, and for the sake of the whole world.

The Collect begins when the priest says or sings, “Let us pray.”

Then there is a period of silence, which is deliberate.

(This is why I like to have the altar servers already in place, so that we don’t think that the silence is simply there to give the server time to arrive with the missal.)

Then the priest proceeds to say or sing the prayer; the people respond by saying or singing “Amen,” which means, “so be it.”

The Collect is an example of the priest’s double role at Mass: He acts in the person of Christ as Head of the Church (*in persona Christi Capitis*), and in the name of the Church (*in nómine Ecclesiae*).

In other words, the priest is the only one praying precisely so that he can pray in on behalf of everyone.

The priest joins the Body of Christ to its Head.

But the prayer belongs to everyone because you say, “Amen.”

The Collects in the new *Roman Missal* will sound different.

This is because the underlying Latin texts are being translated more faithfully.

The Church asks not only that in individual words be translated more exactly, but also that the unique word order and sentence structure of Latin be preserved.

Latin, more so than English, uses “subordinate clauses.”

For example: “O God who...so that...”

Therefore, the sentences of the Collects will be longer and more complex.

(I can’t give you a precise example because only the Order of Mass—not the prayers that change week to week—have been published at this point.)

It should be noted that the Collects have a Trinitarian structure.

The basic form of Christian prayer is to address the Father, through the Son, with and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I encourage you to concentrate on the content of the Collects.

Pray the Collect—and pray whole Mass—by “hanging on every word” that the priest says.

As Vatican Council II teaches, the people offer the Mass not only through but also with the priest (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48).

Please do not say the priest’s prayers aloud—this is forbidden—but by all means follow along silently.

It’s especially important to listen to the Collects during the different liturgical seasons: Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter.

These prayers teach us about the meaning of the season, and develop themes found in the readings.

Often the Collects are prayers that the Church has been praying for centuries.

These treasures handed down to us in the celebration of Mass.