



### A Prayer in Four Parts

“Let us pray...” After the *Gloria*, the priest sings or says this invitation to pray. As the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* describes, “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” (*GIRM*, no. 54). Charles Belmonte notes it is “called the Collect because it sums up and gathers together all the intentions of the day’s sacrifice” (*Understanding the Mass*, p. 65).

According to Belmonte, the Collect has a standard structure of four parts: an invocation to God, the grounds on which we base our confidence (or a reference to the feast of the day), a petition, and a conclusion (see p. 66). For example, we see these four parts in this Collect from the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time: “O God [invocation], who teach us that you abide in hearts that are just and true [grounds for confidence], grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace as to become a dwelling pleasing to you [petition]. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever [conclusion].”

### Praying Together

During the Collect and other prayers in the Mass, the priest extends his hands and arms outward in what is called the “*orans*” position, which means a position of prayer. This position was used by our Jewish ancestors and adapted for Christian prayer. With a historical note from the early Christian writer Tertullian, Belmonte observes that Christians adjusted how the hands are held “so as to resemble those of the Lord on the cross” (p. 65). During the Mass, the priest uses this gesture to indicate that we are all praying together; he is collecting all our prayers and offering them up to the Father.

At the end of this prayer, the people respond by saying, “Amen.” As Fr. Guy Oury teaches us, this Hebrew word means “so be it, without question.” He continues, “The Amen is the people’s stamp of approval on what has just been said in their name. It is a Yes to the priest as having spoken the prayer” (*The Mass*, p. 57). The meaning and function of this simple response invite the congregation to respond boldly with a confident “Amen” in affirmation of this prayer in their name.

### Preparing for Prayer

How should we pray during the Collect? Does the Collect seem to happen so quickly that you miss the words? That brief moment of silence before the prayer is an important one when each person can offer personal intentions to be joined with what the priest is about to pray. Here is a great moment to share interiorly any specific prayers you would like to offer along with the spoken prayers of the Mass. It is also an opportunity to prepare ourselves to listen attentively to the words of the Collect as an overview or summary of the main emphases of the prayers for that particular Mass. Perhaps we could see it as an invitation for how Jesus might teach us in the Mass. We might benefit greatly from reading over the words of the Collect before the Mass. If you have never done it, I would invite you to read through the words a couple of times and ask the Lord to prepare your mind and heart for what is to come. This mentality also prepares us to listen to the Liturgy of the Word, God’s word spoken to His people.