



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Mass is broken into four main parts: the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Concluding Rites. In our examination of the Mass, today we will complete the Introductory Rites.

After the *Gloria*, is the Collect (Opening Prayer). There are three "orations" through the Mass – the Collect, the Prayer Over the Gifts, and the Prayer After Communion. You might think that it would be easier just to call the Collect "the Opening Prayer," but it's more than a prayer to start us out. It is meant to be a time when the priest-president collects the prayers of the assembly and lifts them up to the Father.

What are the implications of this? First, that when the priest says, "Let us pray," that we actually *pray*! It is an opportunity to gather our prayers for all the people in our lives, the struggles and the joys, the problems in the world, and our particular intention for this Mass. This is one of the reasons it is important to prepare for Mass beforehand. If we have a few minutes to pray before Mass, we can think about what we want to offer up to the Father in this Mass, that way, when the priest says, "Let us pray," it won't be the first time we have to think of them. This is an opportunity for us to reach out in trust to the Father, for Jesus told us, "...that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you" (John 15:16). As we bring these to mind and offer them to God the Father, the priest gathers (he *collects*) all the prayers of everyone in the assembly, and lifts them to the Father as part of the *Collect*.

The Collect is made up of three parts. It begins by an opening line of praise to God, moves to asking God for something, and then concludes with the doxology, a prayer praising the Trinity. We then respond with "Amen." *Amen* means "I believe" or "So be it." But it is more than an intellectual assent or a passive assent to the way things are. No, it is an active response, saying, "I would stake my life on it." The root in Hebrew is the same as "foundation," and so with our *Amen* we are saying to God, I'm building my life on the promises you have given, in such a way that if You didn't exist or were unfaithful, my life would fall apart for lack of foundation. The *Amens* come up so many times in the Liturgy, and it is important for us to remember this is not just a passing response, but a way we actively participate in Mass.

I want to make a note about the presences of Christ in the Mass. Vatican II recognized four different ways that Christ is present in the Mass: 1) the Minister (the priest), 2) the Word proclaimed, 3) the Assembly, and 4) the Eucharist. The priest is the presence of Christ since by his ordination he acts *in persona Christi capatis* – in the person of Christ the Head of the Church. It is not Fr. Von acting, but Jesus acting as the words are said, "This is my body...". The Word of God is proclaimed through the Scriptures, and is to be venerated as the true presence of Christ. This will be important to remember as we move into the Liturgy of the Word. Because the Holy Spirit inhabits the Scriptures, He makes Christ present to us when they are proclaimed. Henri de Lubac said:

Scripture is not only divinely guaranteed, it is divinely true. The Spirit did not only dictate it; he is, as it were, contained in it. He inhabits it. His breath perpetually animates it. The Scripture is 'made fruitful by a miracle of the Holy Spirit.' It is 'full of the Spirit.'

The Assembly also bears the presence of Christ. The Assembly, though, is more than the congregation. The Church recognizes that the Assembly at Mass is the whole Church – so at every Mass, every person in the Church on earth is present, those in Purgatory, and those in Heaven. All of the Angels and Saints surround us and are present at every Mass! The final presence of Christ is the Eucharistic species – the Body and Blood of Jesus. This is the Presence of Christ, *par excellence*! We will get more into this when we move in to the Liturgy of the Eucharist.