

The Divine Service: Collect

2nd–6th C.

The theme of the day has been heralded by the Introit; our need for grace for all of life, cried out in the Kyrie; and the coming of our Lord Jesus down to earth to serve us, joyously confessed in the Gloria. The congregation has received her under-shepherd as having the Lord “with his spirit,” to bring to pass the teaching of the Word and administration of the Sacraments, which Christ gave him, and through which the Holy Spirit works and sustains faith. All this builds up to the reading of the lessons and the preaching of the sermon, where the “goods” of the Service of the Word are delivered.

Before we get there, the pastor offers the *collect*, a prayer, generally of ancient origin, collecting the particular promises of the day's readings into a specific prayer for God's acting on and for us in this Divine Service. Most of the collects are, by and large, what have been used continuously in the Church for over 1,500 years, and the youngest of them are as old as the Reformation. In this way the whole Church (of all places and even times) might be seen as praying together, as in Revelation 5—8. Löhe refers to these collected collects as “the breath of a soul, sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, brought to the Eternal Father in the name of his Son” (Reed, 265).

The collects share a common five-part structure that serves as a helpful model for our other *ex corde* (from the heart; that is, not written down) praying. The collect for *Oculi*, the Third Sunday in Lent, provides a full and fine example:

Address: O God

Basis for the petition: whose glory it is always to have mercy,

Petition: be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith

Purpose: to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word;

Doxological ending: through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Note how the collect's structure begins in God's person and nature (the basis expresses why we hope for God to grant what we ask—what he has promised and done). It swiftly moves to ask what particular gift we need and can expect, and envisions for what purpose God is doing it. It concludes with the praise of the God “whose glory it is to have mercy. And all together say, finally, “Amen,” which is, “Yes, yes, it shall be so,” for in this God we believe, and he has promised and is faithful and will do it.