

Each Sunday, after we sing the Gloria, the “collect” or special prayer for the week, is said. These are set for each Sunday of the year, and others for Holy Days, and have been the same since before the 1552 prayer book was compiled by Cranmer. There are also daily Collects and alternatives in modern English.

It’s called a collect from the Latin “collēcta” meaning the gathering of the people together, and may have been applied to this prayer as said before the procession to the church in which Mass was celebrated. It also works in that it gathers our thoughts together, and focusses us on the matter in hand.

They are densely packed with meaning and signs that point to other things, and bear learning and studying, although ironically there isn’t usually time on a Sunday! So let's take a closer look at recent one as an example.

As an example, here is the Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter:

- (1) Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life:
- (2) Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life;
- (3) through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
- (4) Amen.

There is a standard form -

- 1 There is an address to God and to his character or actions in the world on our behalf.
- 2 There is a request.
- 3 There is an invocation and doxology.
- 4 And there is The Amen.

In this prayer, first, we quickly find out that are praying to God, that he is the Almighty, and that to know him (truly) is everlasting life. This picks up the themes of resurrection life which we are thinking about in the post Easter season.

Second, we ask him a petition based on John 14:6 in which Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life” – and this is common since many collects are based on Scriptural texts and themes, indeed this is the reading set for the day.

Having said that knowledge of God is eternal life, we now ask for that knowledge.

The request is also practical, in that it focuses not just on your knowing, but also our doing - to be steadfast in following in Jesus steps. And its reflective of Reformation theological thought that its both our faith and our works that lead to eternal life.

And you might have missed that we’ve also affirmed that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one, and that he is the Son of God.

Third, the doxology - a short hymn of praise. This prayer is offered through Jesus Christ, as he is our intermediary in Heaven (our high priest as the Book of Hebrews says). It affirms that Jesus is alive, and that he is heaven with the Father, but that they are both united with the Holy Spirit - and yet these three are one. Its amazing how much doctrine you can pack into one prayer!

Finally, the Amen is the voice of the whole people agreeing with the celebrant – “So be it!” or “We agree with you!” I like to think that its all to do with inflection - Agree? Agree! Amen? Amen! And Matthew 18:19 tells us that what is agreed on earth is agreed on heaven. So when you say Amen, a powerful thing happens, so don’t forget it!