

## *Setting the Stage: The Opening Prayer*

The last part of the *Introductory Rites* of the Mass (which include the *entrance procession*, *opening song*, *liturgical greeting*, *penitential rite or sprinkling with holy water*, and the *Gloria*) is the **opening prayer**. This is one of the most ancient parts of the opening rites of the Eucharistic liturgy. This brief prayer actually summarizes and expresses the theme of the whole Sunday celebration to come, as presented in the scripture readings assigned for the day. The prayer begins with the presider inviting the Assembly to pray, then providing a period of silence for all gathered to pray their personal prayers in the silence of their hearts. This silence is a deliberate communal silence that allows all in the Assembly to recollect their thoughts and recall the petitions that each one brings to the celebration of the Eucharist. When the presider prays aloud the *opening prayer* in the name of all, it is meant to sum up and gather into one the silent, personal prayers of the people. This opening prayer has traditionally been referred to as "the collect" based on the fact that the presider, so to speak, "collects" the prayers of the faithful in this prayer addressed to the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. When there is adequate shared silence, and all those present really do recollect their thoughts and recall their personal petitions, then this "collect" truly has something to collect. During this prayer the presider also extends his hands in what is referred to as the "orans posture of prayer". 'Orans' is simply the Latin word for 'praying'. This gesture conveys that it is to God the Father to whom the prayer is addressed. The out-stretched arms was also a gesture of the early Christians that symbolized liberation - a gesture of being free from the shackles of slavery, both physical and spiritual.

Please let us know what else about our faith tradition you'd like to find out more about.  
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