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## **THE CLASSIC COLLECT** A Spiritual Exercise in Writing Prayers

1 There's a distinctive shape or structure to the traditional prayer anciently called a Collect. That's pronounced "KOLL-ekt", with the stress on the first syllable, rather than on the last syllable, as when we're speaking of the verb "to gather", for instance. A traditional Collect gathers – "collects" – our prayer into one neat package!

2 Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW), our current Lutheran worship resource, does not use the traditional term, and calls them instead simply "prayers", as in "Prayers of the Day." And there are no fewer than three per Sunday or Festival, a distinct Prayer of the Day – or Collect – for every Sunday or Festival in our new ecumenical three-year Lectionary. A Collect, you might say, tailored to gather the themes of the specific Lections for each occasion: An opulent new treasure indeed!

3 You can find them all on pages 18 - 63 in ELW, as well as additional prayers, mostly in classic Collect-form, on pages 72 - 87.

4 Aside: Is it a "dumbing down" that prompted the framers of ELW to avoid the traditional term Collect? I hope not. Perhaps it was decided to use the more familiar term "Prayer" simply because of its, well, familiarity.

5 In any case, the traditional Collect has a distinctive shape or structure. And it occurs to me that Christian people – leaders of Christian worship especially – might find it profitable to learn that shape, and to practice constructing their own Collects following that shape. Yet another spiritual exercise!

6 This posting would therefore constitute an eleventh in my on-going series of Spiritual Exercises. Previous postings in this series include:

- Essay 204 Signs of the Kingdom
- Essay 208 A Spiritual Autobiography
- Essay 211 A Discipline of Daily Prayer
- Essay 214 My Ten Greatest Hymns
- Essay 220 Benedicite Omnia Opera and Berachah (two exercises)
- Essay 229 A Wound Map
- Essay 233 A Supergraphic Mural
- Essay 235 The Seven Deadly Sins
- Essay 243 A Blind Walk

7 Let's turn to that shape or structure. I'll use as my model the Collect – the Prayer of the Day – for Year B of the Sixth Sunday of Easter. You may find this lovely prayer in ELW page 34. Long ago, when I was still in Seminary, I memorized this prayer for occasions at the bedside of parishioners. And I have used it widely ever since then.

8 AN ADDRESS: The shape or structure of a classic Collect begins with an Address, in the case of our model, simply “O God...” But the prayer might be addressed to God using any one of a host of other appellations: Almighty God, O God of Glory, Gracious and glorious God, Eternal God, Compassionate God, Sovereign God, Holy God. A glance at other Collects in these pages will show an enormous range of possibilities.

9 On rare occasions, a Collect may be addressed to other members of the Trinity: “O Lord Jesus...”, in the prayer for Year C of the Seventh Sunday after Epiphany, ELW page 25. Or the Holy Spirit: “Eternal Light...Eternal Wisdom...Eternal Compassion...”: ELW page 51.

10 The so-called ANTECEDENT REASON is the second part of a classic Collect. The Antecedent Reason, as the name implies, posits the basis for presuming to pray. Because our God is gracious, we can take heart to make our prayer. And here we cite our reason.

11 Note that the Collect, with its Address and its Antecedent Reason, becomes a kind of Berachah. See Essay 220 above. Our prayer could very well stand alone – constitute a complete prayer – with these two elements only. Pious Jews are enjoined to pray 100 berakoth each day!

12 In our model, ELW page 34, the Antecedent Reason is extended: “...you have prepared for those who love you joys beyond understanding...” The Antecedent Reason is pure praise. There might be those who argue that this is the only proper prayer. God knows what we want and need. There's no need for us to ask God for anything. For our part, we need only to offer our praise. For an endless variety of God's gifts and graces.

13 The third element in a classic Collect: The PETITION itself. Because we have warrant to come to God for anything, like a child to a parent, we are bold to ask in a Petition. In our model, page 34, the Petition is: “...Pour into our hearts such love for you...” This is the heart of our prayer. This Petition is what we are asking for, mindful of God's grace in the Antecedent Reason. And a traditional Collect presents only one Petition. If you've got a second or third Petition in mind, write a second and third separate Collect.

14 The fourth element: The RESULTS desired. In our model page 34, the Result desired is a consequence of the Petition itself: “...that, loving you above all things, we may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire...”

15 The fifth and final element of a classic Collect: The OBLATION or DOXOLOGY. Oblation means offering; Doxology means an ascription of praise. The entire prayer in our model, page 34, is offered to God in a Trinitarian Doxology: “...through Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.”

16 It's worth noting that the full Trinitarian Doxology, as in our model, page 34, has traditionally been used only during the festival seasons of Advent-Christmas and Lent-Easter. During the "green" seasons – so-called "Ordinary Time", the time after Epiphany and the time after Pentecost – we use only the simple Oblation "...through Jesus Christ, our saviour and Lord. Amen."

17 It's also worth noting that under no circumstances should the people be invited to read aloud the Collect of the Day along with the Presiding Minister. As I have tried to stress on many occasions in these postings, Christian worship is a post-literate experience. Only worship leaders need be literate. The people – the assembled congregation – should never be expected to read paragraphs of unfamiliar prose or even poetry. See Essay 205 above.

18 Well, there you have it. The shape or structure of a classic Collect. Now it's your turn. Here's the Spiritual Exercise: Write your own classic Collect. Follow models in ELW pages 18 - 87.

19 And do not neglect to memorize many of the terrific prayers in those pages. They'll come in handy at many a bedside.

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