

Writing a Collect

If you choose to listen to the audio version of our daily readings, you will notice that each day ends with a prayer. This prayer is traditionally called a 'collect.' In all my reading I still can't figure out where this name came from, but a collect seems to be like the haiku of prayers. Do you remember being taught to write a haiku in elementary school? It is such a simple form that anyone can do it - there is no pressure to be profound. And yet, I am often surprised by the beauty and freedom that comes from following such a simple pattern.

Many of us learned our patterns of prayer from listening to adults pray in church. But we often struggle with the line between petition and performance when praying aloud. Reading the psalms is our first indication that prayer does not need to be pretty or pious, but it is best when it is honest. So I invite you to try writing a collect, not as art to perform but as a response to your reading and reflection.

A collect is often prayed in a worship gathering after people have read scripture and spent time in silence or aloud praying for individual concerns. The collect then wraps up the gathering and the time of worship. If you did a quick search, you could find collects for different everyday concerns and based on individual scriptures. There is no set length, rhythm, or rhyme to a collect, but there are a few common elements.

I first was led to see this pattern by Pádraig Ó Tuama in his book "Daily Prayer with the Corymeela Community." He points out 5 common elements of a collect and I have been writing collects as a part of the way I reflect on and respond to scripture.

Elements Of A Collect:

- 1 Address God
 - 2 Rehearse part of the story of God
 - 3 Name my desire - just one desire
 - 4 Offer my reason for desiring this
 - 5 Echo the name/story of God
- Amen (or word of praise)

Example Of A Collect:

Lord Jesus Christ,
you stretched out your arms of love on
the hard wood of the Cross that everyone
might come within the reach of your
saving embrace:
So clothe us in your Spirit
that we, reaching forth our hands in love,
may bring those who do not know you to
the knowledge and love of you;
for the honor of your Name.
Amen.