

Understanding the Mass

Part 6 in a series

Further preparation: a close look at the Penitential Act, the Confiteor

Our priest has offered us a greeting and we have responded, asking the Lord to be with him as he proceeds with the Holy Mass. He then invites us to acknowledge our sins by saying, “Brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.” This is an important part of the Mass because we come before the Lord as sinners and we should ask for His forgiveness (“*prepare ourselves*”) before partaking of the Holy Eucharist.

Penitential Act – The Confiteor (Latin for “I confess”)

You may notice that there is a slight pause before the deacon or priest initiates the Confiteor. This brief moment is given to us so that we can truly bring to mind our sins prior to starting our confession. Notice also that we start by saying that we are openly confessing to God and to our fellow parishioners. We are acknowledging to all present that we are in need of forgiveness for what we have done and what we have failed to do. Failed to do? Yes! We ask for forgiveness for the times we failed to follow the teachings of Christ and do what Christ asked of us when interacting with our brothers and sisters.

Then comes our “*mea culpa*” (Latin for “through my fault”). As we say these words three times, we beat our breast. Why? This is an action signifying our sorrow for our sins; a sign of repentance and remorse. As with other parts of the Mass, this comes from scripture. (Homework! Read: Luke 23:48, Luke 18:13 and Jeremiah 31:19).

The Confiteor ends with us asking for our Blessed Mother Mary, all the Angels and Saints and even everyone in the congregation to pray for us to God, asking for His forgiveness. We should give serious thought to what we are doing here. We are invoking the power of prayer upon ourselves, asking for no less than the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary, the Angels and all the Saints, along with our fellow believers. Doing this means that we should be sincere in our request for this powerful action, so think about this as you pray the Confiteor at each Mass!

The Confiteor is then followed by the words of absolution by our Priest. “May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life.” Note that this Penitential Act does not take the place of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) for mortal sins. If we have committed any mortal sins we must make a sacramental confession before receiving the Eucharist.

We end with the three-fold request for God’s Mercy: Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy. (During Advent and Lent we use the Greek: Kyrie, eleison; Christe, eleison; Kyrie, eleison.)

Note that at certain times in the Liturgical year (especially Easter) the Penitential Act is replaced with the sprinkling of Holy Water. This is a remembrance of our Baptism.