



Praying the Mass Anew

*The New Translation of The Roman Missal
and Our Actual Participation at Mass*

9. Preparing to Offer Mass: The “Penitential Act.”

As part of the beginning of Mass, and for the sake of preparing to enter more fully into an encounter with God himself in the Eucharist, the people are typically invited to “acknowledge their sins.” This recalling of sin is part of what is called the **Penitential Act**. In this moment, all who are present are to individually remember the *venial sins* they have committed and ask God for his mercy, that all of our sins will be forgiven, so that we will be ready to hear God’s word in Scripture and to approach the sacrament of the Eucharist. (Please read “Question of the Week” on the next page for more detail on sin and preparation for

Holy Communion). In this column, we look at the renewed versions for the Penitential Act.

As in the old version, there remain three ways that the priest may lead the people in this Penitential Act, all of which include the prayer litany of “Lord, have mercy,” and “Christ, have mercy.” The **first form** is the traditional prayer known more formally as the “Confiteor,” (the “I confess to almighty God” prayer). This prayer, which dates to the 6th Century, is offered to prepare us to meet Christ by realistically acknowledging our need for his mercy; not to say how bad we are. The more literal translating of the Latin into English is very clear in the new version of this prayer, shown below:

First Form of the Penitential Act

All recite together:

I confess to almighty God
and to you my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have failed to do,

*And, gently striking their breast three times,
they say:*

**through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;**

Then they continue:

therefore I ask blessed Mary, ever-Virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

- **that I have greatly sinned:**

That “I have greatly sinned” puts into words more clearly the serious nature of sin, toward inviting us to humbly acknowledge our need for God’s mercy and forgiveness more openly.

- **three uses of “through my fault”:**

The three-fold “through my fault” is also more literal from the Latin “*mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa,*” the third of which emphasizes our recognition of the gravity of sin as “most grievous.” Once more, such emphasis seeks to open us to a humble recognition of our need for God’s mercy resulting from any and every sin. Note also that the people are “striking their breast” during these words, as though they are stoning themselves for their sins with their fist, that sins might be crushed (not persons).

The **second form** (which is not frequently used) for offering the Penitential Act also has significant changes →

Both the first and second forms of the Penitential Act continue with the priest's words:

May almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life.

This "absolution" as it is called, does not carry the same effect as absolution given in sacramental confession. It is effective in taking away venial sins and it prepares us for entering into the offering of the Mass more fully. However, in the case of mortal sins, sacramental Confession is the normal means for the forgiveness of any mortal sins.

After these words of forgiveness are spoken by the priest, both of these forms of the Penitential Act are then concluded with the recited or sung litany

Second Form of the Penitential Act

The priest says: Have mercy on us, O Lord.

The people reply: **For we have sinned against you.**

The priest: Show us, O Lord, your mercy.

The people: **And grant us your salvation.**

"Lord, have mercy," "Christ, have mercy," etc. like in the previous translation of Mass.

The **third form** of making the Penitential Act which **contains short invocations by the priest (or deacon) followed by the litany responses of "Lord, have mercy," etc.** is not changed for the people. While the invocations have been retranslated, the litany remains the same. This form is also concluded with the absolution that is used in the first two forms.

The Penitential Act, offered in any of the three forms given, removes venial sin, making us more prepared to enter more fully into Holy Communion with God, through the offering of the Mass.

Question of the Week:

➤ ***None of us are truly worthy of communion. Why does it matter if we have committed sins? After all, isn't the Eucharist offered "so that sins may be forgiven?"***

In our offering of the Mass, the invitation to Holy Communion is not merely a matter of knowing about God or that the Eucharist is an offering for sins. More properly, each person who desires to receive must be striving to live in this Holy Communion. Sin is an offense against God that separates us from God. In order to be in true communion, there can be nothing in one's soul which separates or divides them from God (who is perfect life and communion). Therefore, it remains necessary that all who partake of Eucharistic communion would be free from sin in approaching this sacrament. For forgiveness of venial sins, the Penitential Act of the Mass itself is sufficient. For the forgiveness of mortal sins, confession of these mortal sins in the sacrament of Confession remains necessary in order to assure one is in a proper "state of grace," or free from sin and able to truly be in communion with God.