

Welcoming the New *Roman Missal*



What will we be saying differently at Mass? The Act of Penitence

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An ancient document called the *Didache* (c.60) noted that the people came together on the Lord's Day and gave thanks "after first confessing their sins." For many centuries, the Mass had no penitential rite. The *Confiteor* was part of the private prayers said by the priest and the ministers at the foot of the altar. After Vatican II, a brief penitential rite was added that had its source in both Scripture (Matthew 5:23-25) and tradition. (cf. *The Mystery of Faith* by Lawrence Johnson, page 13)

Now the act of penitence has several options. Each begins with an invitation by the priest to recall our sins and a pause for silent reflection. We may all respond by praying the *Confiteor*, a prayer that acknowledges the social dimension of sin. The new translation of this prayer restores the "through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault."

Alternately, we may respond to a series of invocations addressed to Christ. What was once a long litany, was shortened in the sixth century and now consists of three verses (tropes) that conclude with the ancient Greek response – *Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison*. St. Paul used the word *kyrios* to acknowledge Christ and his divinity. We also may respond in English – "Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy."

Another option uses Scripture. (Baruch 3:2 and Psalm 85:8) This is followed by the "Lord, have mercy" in Greek or English.

The final option may be used on Sundays, especially during the Easter season. Water is blessed and sprinkled on the people as a reminder of their baptism and the reconciliation brought about by Christ. The *Asperges* rite comes from Psalm 51:9 "Cleanse me of sin with hyssop, that I may be purified." During Eastertide, this verse is replaced by the *Vidi Aquam* a text about the water flowing from the temple. (Ezekiel 47:1, 8, 9)

Each of these rites concludes with the priest's absolution – "May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life." Though these words lack the efficacy of the sacrament of penance (GIRM 51), they are a fitting reminder that we all seek God's mercy, especially as we come together to celebrate his sacred mysteries.

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Options for the Act of Penitence

PRIEST: Brethren [brothers and sisters], let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.

(Pause)

PEOPLE: 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, **through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault;** 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.

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

PEOPLE: Amen.

OR

PRIEST: Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.

(Pause)

PRIEST: Have mercy on us, O Lord.

PEOPLE: For we have sinned against you.

PRIEST: Show us, O Lord, your mercy.

PEOPLE: And grant us your salvation.

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

PEOPLE: Amen.

OR

PRIEST: Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.

After a brief pause to allow us to recall our sins, the priest, deacon, or other minister offers various invocations and we respond.

MINISTER: You were sent to heal the contrite of heart:

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy (or *Kyrie, eleison*).

Lord, have mercy (or *Kyrie, eleison*).

MINISTER: You came to call sinners:

Christ, have mercy (or *Christe, eleison*).

PEOPLE: Christ, have mercy (or *Christe, eleison*).

MINISTER: You are seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us:

Lord, have mercy (or *Kyrie, eleison*).

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy (or *Kyrie, eleison*).

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

PEOPLE: Amen.