

The Year of Faith

Catechesis on the Mass

Act of Penitence

With the procession into the sanctuary having been completed and the assembly having been greeted by the priest celebrant, we are immediately invited to remember that we do not gather for Mass because of *our own merits*, but rather we gather as sinners begging for the mercy of God. It is not possible for us to participate in the sacred mysteries which are celebrated at Mass without first acknowledging our constant need for the forgiveness of God.

The Act of Penitence takes the form of a general confession of sin and can take three different forms. The first form is the recitation of the “I confess...” while the other two consist of invocations with responses. The priest then prays for the forgiveness of his own sins and the sins of the people. (Note that this does NOT take the place of going to Confession regularly!) The Act of Penitence always includes the words “Kyrie eleison” (“Lord have mercy”) and “Christe eleison” (“Christ have mercy”). Interestingly, this part of the Mass is so ancient that it was never translated into Latin; these words are the only Greek words in the entire Mass. On Sundays, it is possible to replace the Act of Penitence with a Sprinkling Rite which calls to mind our Baptism.

Next week we cover the Gloria...

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