



## Archdiocese of New York + 2011

### ACTS OF PENITENCE

**The Acts of Penitence in the Mass:** In the Introductory Rites of most Masses, following the Greeting, all present are invited to pause to reflect on their own sinfulness and to ask mercy of the great and loving God whose supreme act of love they are about to celebrate. As we enter the great Mystery which is the Mass, this Rite serves as a reminder to us of our fundamental unworthiness, unworthiness redeemed by the passion, death and resurrection of Christ our Lord.

**The Acts of Penitence in the New Roman Missal** have the same forms as those familiar to us in the present Mass, although some of the texts have slightly different translations. Each form begins with an invitation by the priest to *acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries*. This invitation is followed by a period of silence in which we reflect briefly on our own sinfulness. Each form concludes with absolution, a prayer by the priest for forgiveness, in the words: *May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life, to which all present respond Amen*. While this "absolution" does not carry the power of the absolution given in the sacrament of Penance, when an individual confesses his or her sins directly to the priest, it is a powerful plea for God's mercy made by the priest on his own behalf and on behalf of all who join with him in this Eucharist.

**The three forms of the Acts of Penitence:** There are three forms from which the priest may choose the Act of Penitence. **The first form** is the *Confiteor*. In this form, we pray the prayer familiar to all of us with a few changes in translation underlined in the text below:

*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 striking their breast, they say:]  
*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.*

The changes have been made to communicate the original Latin text more accurately. Although present in the Latin, the word *greatly* as a modifier of *sinned* is not found in the translation we are presently using. Since it reflects the depth to which sin can invade our lives and, equally important, our consequent complete dependence upon God's mercy for forgiveness, it was decided that this translation conveys more fully the enormity of sin and our fundamental need of God's mercy. The threefold *through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault* was restored because, like *et cum spiritu tuo*, it is one of those phrases that is deeply ingrained in the corporate memory of the Church. Its significant place in our spiritual heritage is seen as reason to give it as literal a translation as possible. **The second form** retains the same structure of invocation and response as the current version, however there have been several slight changes in wording: After the silent pause for reflection, the priest prays the invocation *Have mercy on us, O Lord*, to which those present respond *for we have sinned against you*. The priest then prays: *Show us, O Lord, your mercy* to which the response *And grant us your salvation* is made by those assembled. **The third form** which consists of three invocations with a response to each invocation remains the same as in the current Missal.

**Alternatives to the Act of Penitence:** On some occasions the Act of Penitence is replaced by another rite. In the Easter Season the Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water, appropriate at that time because it recalls our Baptism, may replace it. In addition, when another rite (e.g. the Blessing of Ashes or of Palms), takes place at the beginning of Mass, the Penitential Rite is omitted.