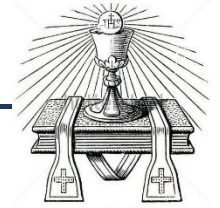




The Mass in Slow Motion



The Penitential Rite & The Kyrie

This is a series on the Mass explaining the meaning and history of what we do each Sunday. This series of flyers is an attempt to add insight and understanding to our celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. You are also invited to learn more by attending Sunday School classes for adults which take place in the school cafeteria each Sunday from 9:45 am. to 10:45 am.

This series will follow the Mass in order.

The Penitential Rite in general—Let us recall that we have just acknowledged and celebrated the presence of Christ among us: venerated the altar, signed ourselves with the cross and greeted one another and the priest invites the congregation to take part in the penitential rite, which the entire community carries out a communal acknowledgment of sin. He uses these or similar words, “Let us acknowledge our sins and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.” The penitential rite may take several different forms:

- ❖ **A Confiteor** (I confess) recited by the priest and people together followed by an absolution. (The absolution only forgives venial sins. Mortal sins must be absolved in the Sacrament of Confession).
- ❖ **A rarely used Miserere** consisting of the following formula:
 - Have mercy on us O Lord
 - For we have sinned against you
 - Show us O Lord your mercy.
 - And grant us your salvation.
- ❖ **A Kyrie Litany**—There are numerous forms for this given in the Missal. The priest, deacon (or some other suitable minister) makes invocations. Here is one sample:
 - You raise the dead to life in the Spirit. Lord have mercy.
 - You bring pardon and peace to the sinner. Christ have mercy.
 - You bring light to those in darkness. Lord have mercy.



The penitential rite echoes the experience of those in Scripture who encountered God. This often led to the experience of unworthiness, and even a falling to the ground! Isaiah lamented his sinfulness and needed to be reassured by the angel (Is 6:5). Ezekiel fell to his face before God (Ez. 2:1). Daniel experienced anguish and terror (Dan 7:15). Job was silenced before God and repented (42:6); John the Apostle fell to his face before the glorified and ascended Jesus (Rev 1:17). Thus, it makes sense that acknowledging the presence of the Lord we ought to repent of our sins and seek the Lord’s mercy.

History of the Penitential Rite. Even as early as the Didache (written ca 90-100 AD) a confession of sins is prescribed before the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist:

On the Lord’s Day gather together, break bread and give thanks after confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure. Let no one who has a quarrel with his neighbor join you until he is reconciled, lest your sacrifice be defiled. For this is that which was proclaimed by the Lord...In every place and time let there be offered to me a clean Sacrifice.



Older Catholics and those who have attended the Traditional Latin Mass, experience the “I confess...” prayer as part of the prayers at the foot of the altar, but this was actually prior to the beginning of Mass. Since the priest altar servers prayed this at the foot of the altar, technically, he had not gone up the altar steps to begin Mass yet. Thus, the introduction of this element *into* the Mass itself and as a communal gesture is new.

The Confiteor (I confess) and the Kyrie (Lord have mercy) have very different histories and will be explained separately.

The History of the Confiteor (I Confess). The history of this part of the Mass is somewhat convoluted. The remote history may be found in the Western Liturgy in the silent worship which the Pope made when he first came to the altar. Later (by the 7th Century) this silent prayer became more elaborate with the directive being that the celebrant lie prostrate before the altar. Likewise, the nature of the prayer came to be more specified. The celebrant was directed to pour forth prayers for himself and for the sins of the people. The general term for this was the *apologiae* (apology) and may be called the forerunner of the Confiteor. Thus, a penitential theme was introduced.

By the 11th Century the Confiteor had developed as a specific dialogue between the Celebrant and those immediately around him. Thus, he not only acknowledges his own sinfulness before God, but also before those who serve him and asks their mediation on his behalf. The actual text of the Confiteor, was taken from those used in sacramental confession. The oldest Confiteor formulas were simple and brief.

In the Gothic period (12th – 16th Centuries) there grew a practice of listing some of the Saints by name. This is evident in the Confiteor used in the old Latin Mass which listed St. Mary, St. Michael, St John the Baptist, Sts. Peter and Paul. Today the list is briefer mentioning Mary, and the angels and saints. One other difference today from the old Latin Mass is that there is no longer a separate recitation of the Confiteor for priest and the servers. Now the communal aspect of the act is stressed even while the personal aspect is retained. Now all say “I confess” but say it together.

The History of the Kyrie—the Kyrie (Lord have Mercy) is often thought of as a part of the penitential rite but this is not historically the case. Its use was first reported in use in Jerusalem in the 4th Century wherein the phrase “Kyrie Eleison” was sung in response to a series of intercessory prayers sung by a deacon. This practice took place after the Gospel, like it does today. In other areas in the Eastern Churches, it was generally located at the beginning of Mass. The form of the Kyrie was retained as a litany of praise and petition before God and these prayers grew in elaborateness.

In a desire to simplify and shorten the liturgy in the Western Church, Pope Gregory the Great in the early 7th Century removed the prayers and kept only responses Kyrie Eleison and Christe Eleison. In the old Latin Mass, the Kyrie was NOT considered part of the penitential rite which had already taken place at the foot of the Altar.

Today the Kyrie can function as a part of the Penitential Rite when combined with acclamations such as, “You came to call sinners, Lord have mercy” and so forth. Or the Kyrie can serve as a kind of hymn of praise, following the Confiteor (I confess). So, the Kyrie has somewhat of a dual personality. It may serve either as a penitential rite or a hymn of praise.

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Mass schedule: Sundays: 8 am, 9:30 am, 11 am & 7 pm; Saturdays: 8 am & 4:30 pm; Daily: 7 am in the chapel