



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 Profession of Faith

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God.
begotten, not made, **consubstantial** with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

*At the words that follow, through
and including "and became man," all bow.*

**and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate
of the Virgin Mary,**
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he **suffered death** and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is **adored** and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

- **Overall:** As we look at the words of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, there are notable changes and style and in particular words that are used:
- **"I" believe** – The very word in the Latin version is "credo," not "credimus," (which would be "We believe.") The "I" is not meant to make our act of professing faith individualistic. Rather, it might be understood as the Body of Christ, of which we are all members, professing faith as one. Note also that we say "I believe," at the beginning of each new section of the creed.
- **"consubstantial with the Father"** – "consubstantial" literally means "one in being," as the former version had us say. The use of "consubstantial" more properly reflects the traditional, elevated language of Church teaching on the reality that God the Father and God the Son are one "in substance;" they are united in being.
- **"by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary"** – that God takes on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ is a mystery properly called the Incarnation. That Jesus "was incarnate of the Virgin Mary" more truly reflects that he was not simply "born," but truly takes on human flesh through Mary.
- **Regarding the style of the prayer** – another notable change is the way that some phrases, which in the previous translation were given as complete sentences, are now parts of larger sentences. While this style is more literal, the connecting of phrases unifies the prayer more properly, better connecting related statements.