

## Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

### Reflection 4: The Introductory Rites, Part II

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One of the most ancient Church documents - the Didache [*di-dah-kay*] - states that on the Lord's Day, people are to come together to give thanks "after first confessing their sins." We continue this ancient practice at the start of Mass by what is called, the "Act of Penitence." This act takes place at the beginning of Mass for good reason: Matthew records Christ's command that we be reconciled with God and one another before offering our sacrifice at the altar. By proclaiming our sinfulness before a merciful and loving God, we show our continuing need for conversion, healing, and reconciliation.

The Penitential Rite, as it is sometimes called, has a four-part structure. First, we are invited to reflect for a few moments in silence on our sinfulness. This is followed by a common proclamation, the Confiteor, that all are sinners before God. Recently restored to the rite are the words, "*through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.*" The priest concludes the rite by asking for forgiveness for all present. Although the rite concludes with the priest's absolution, it does not take the place of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

On some occasions, especially during the Easter Season, the Penitential Rite may be replaced by what is called, the "Rite of Sprinkling." This sprinkling of the people with holy water is a reminder and renewal of our baptism and harks back to a popular eighth-century monastic practice. Three different prayers are given for the blessing of the water to be used in the sprinkling. The third, used during the Easter season, highlights the Paschal Mystery and calls to mind Christ's resurrection, which lies at the heart of all reconciliation.

After the act of penitence, we acclaim the Lord and implore his mercy in the words:

*"Lord, have mercy."* Addressed to Christ, this acclamation may take the form of *"Kyrie, eleison"* (Lord, have mercy), *"Christe, eleison"* (Christ, have mercy), *"Kyrie, eleison"* (Lord, have mercy). It is usually sung in dialogue by the entire assembly with the choir or cantor. Short verses, also addressed to Christ, may be inserted into the acclamation.

The Penitential Rite continues with the Gloria, which is sometimes called "the angelic hymn." Echoing the words of the angels at Bethlehem, this hymn-anthem has a beautiful Trinitarian characteristic. The text mentions all three persons of the Trinity. The Gloria is preferably sung on Sundays outside Advent and Lent, as well as at other solemn celebrations.

Once the Gloria ends, we hear, *"Let us pray,"* signaling that the Collect follows. The name given this prayer - the Collect - describes its purpose. It is intended to "gather together" the intentions of the faithful. The Collect has the same structure as other prayers during the Mass - an address, a petition, and a conclusion. The priest invites the people to pray, and a brief silence is shared, thereby allowing those present to be aware of God's presence and to call to mind their intentions. The prayer is addressed to God the Father; the petition is general since it sums up the prayers of those present; and the conclusion is through Jesus Christ.