



## Mea Culpa, Mea Culpa, Mea Maxima Culpa

Once we begin to use the revised translation of the Mass this Advent, one of the first places we encounter a change beyond “And also with your spirit,” is in the Penitential Rite. This Rite has several options, but the one that will immediately challenge us is the use of the *Confiteor*. Here is the current and the new translations:

### Current Translation:

I confess to almighty God  
And to you, my brothers and sisters,  
That I have sinned through  
My own fault  
In my thoughts and in my words,  
In what I have done,  
And in what I have failed to do;  
And 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.

### New Translation:

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  
{ *striking one's breast each time...* }  
**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.

If you are old enough, you instantly recognize a return to the *mea culpa* of the Latin and the first translation into English – as well as the thrice repeated act of striking one's breast. The language changes and the repetition of action is not meant to make our feel like we are terrible people. It is not an attempt to tweak our good old-fashioned Catholic guilt. But it is a call to humbly admit how much we are in need of God's mercy – especially before we enter into the divine mystery of proclaiming the Word of God and celebrating the Eucharist. In any of its approved forms, the Penitential Rite is a celebration of God's mercy.

### A New Tone

The new translation of the Penitential Rite won't just bring a change in words. It also calls for a change in the tenor of our participation in Mass. The Penitential Rite is not simply a transition from the beginning of Mass to the readings, it is a moment of the Mass that hopefully began before you arrived at the Church. As faithful people are called, each and every day, to cultivate a greater awareness of our faults in our thoughts, our words, in what we have done and in what we have failed to do – and our personal responsibility for those failings. It is that on-going examination we should bring to the Mass in all humility, into the Penitential Rite, with a more sorrowful attitude toward God as we confess our sins. The triple repetition while striking our breasts in repentance is meant to be an outward sign that points to a fuller, inner expresses our sorrow over sin.

At the same time we remember that the Penitential Rite is not just our admission of our faults, it is a celebration of God's response in His mercy. Scripture assures us that “*The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal; Nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds*” (Sirach 35:21).

## **God's Mercy and Salvation**

Scripture also reminds us that *the just fall seven times each day* (Proverbs 24:16) – and still we are called to enter into the holy mystery of the Mass, Christ's unique self-sacrifice on the Cross and his victory over sin and death. We are called to enter into the Paschal Mystery which is the source and foundation of the forgiveness of sin. Many people do not realize that the Penitential Rite offers God's mercy and forgiveness for the venial sins which we consciously bring to mind for this celebration of Mass. (It does not offer mercy and forgiveness for mortal sin which we are required to confess and receive penance and absolution).

The words of the Rite are intended to help us realize how grateful we should be in spite of the fact that we've "greatly sinned" and have "grievous faults." Grateful because we have a God of mercy who died for us and for our the gift of our salvation. And what a gift. In the Penitential Rite we are approach God because we know God to be gracious and merciful and we know the Most High will respond.

The Penitential Rite reminds us to begin our approach in the humility that involves real knowledge of self. As St Bonaventure wrote, "Humility is the guardian and gateway of all the virtues." The new translation of the rite is meant to help us, not only at the gateway, but throughout the journey to the fullness of life in Christ.