

Understanding the Mass

The Penitential Rite

Each week, we are explaining the different parts of the Mass - what is in the church, what we use in the Mass, and why (and how) we celebrate Mass the way we do.

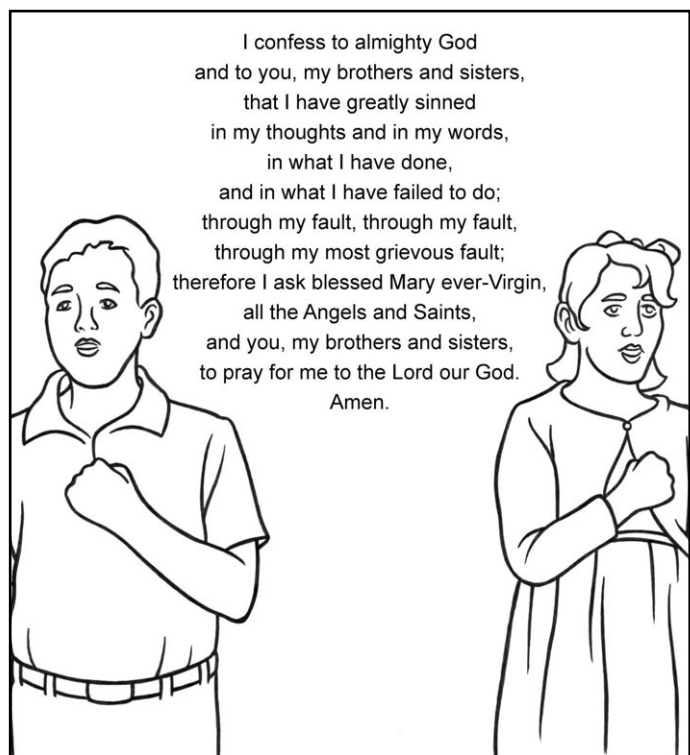
*Today our topic is the **Penitential Rite**.*

The **Penitential Rite** is the part of the Mass when we are invited to examine the way we have acted towards God, and towards each other. **Penitential** comes from the Latin *paenitentia*, meaning “repentance”, and **rite** also comes from Latin - *ritus*, meaning “custom” or “ceremony”. The priest invites us to acknowledge our sins, what we have done wrong, and together with all the people we ask for forgiveness and say we are sorry.

There are three “forms” of the Penitential Act, each of which end with a prayer of absolution (forgiveness).

The form that we use the most often is a prayer that we all pray together, starting with the words “I confess”. You can read the full prayer in the picture.

Confessing (acknowledging) sin was a common practice in ancient Israel, and is referenced throughout the Old Testament. Saint John and Saint James also reflect this in their letters, writing: “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed”.



When we pray the words “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault”, you will see people striking their chest, as is shown in the picture. Just like saying the same words three times shows how we take responsibility for our sins, this action is a sign of humility, a recognition that we have sinned, and that we are sorry.

Through the eyes of faith, forgiveness is first of all a gift from God. It is not something we can do by ourselves. Jesus gave His own life for us. No matter what we have done wrong, He is there waiting for us to turn to Him for forgiveness. In the Penitential Rite we ask Jesus, who is God, to forgive us our sins and give us the courage to say sorry to others.