

Riteing What's Wrong: Lord, Have Mercy!

"To prepare ourselves to celebrate these sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins..."

This is perhaps the most common or familiar introduction to the **Penitential Rite** that comes at the beginning of Mass, immediately after the Sign of the Cross and Liturgical Greeting by the priest. (*'The Lord be with you'* is the Liturgical Greeting, in contrast to any personal greeting or words of introduction the priest may add.) There are two different rites that can be used at this starting point in the Mass, the Penitential Rite, and the Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling with Holy Water. The purpose of both rites is to help us open fully to the grace of God presented to us in Mass by directing our attention to our need of it, and the abundance of that gift given us in Baptism, and renewed in each celebration of the Eucharist. The wording of the rite seems to focus on our sin, but it is really God's mercy and love that are at the center of our attention here, as always. At the beginning of Mass this rite makes us conscious of our need to be purified as we celebrate the great mystery before us, and focuses us on God's gift of grace that purifies us as we need. There are several different forms of the Penitential Rite: the first is the *Confiteor*, the prayer that begins "*I confess to Almighty God, and to you my brothers and sisters...*". The second, less often used form is a dialogue between the priest and people - "*Lord, we have sinned against you. Show us your mercy and love...and grant us your salvation*". The third is the most familiar from in which the priest begins with various invocations about Christ's loving work and nature – *You came to gather all people into the peace of God's Kingdom* – and the people respond with *Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy*. The Penitential Rite is a sort of "mini-Sacrament of Penance" in which we can regularly "face up and 'fess up" to our secret faults and failures which rob us of the fuller, freer life we long for, and which God intends for us. It is a reminder both of our need for ongoing healing and forgiveness, and of God's readiness to meet that need.

Please let us know what else about our faith tradition you'd like to find out more about.

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