



NATIONAL
**Eucharistic
Revival**

**Step-by-Step Walk Through the Mass
Do This in Remembrance of Me, Part 9:
Forms of Penitential Act
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As we mentioned last time, the Penitential Act has three different forms. Why are there three? For starters, each of these three prayers have been present in liturgical celebrations since the early days of the Church. Although they are similar in that they each acknowledge the truth about God (he is merciful) and us (we need mercy), they each do so in a different way.

Form A, the *Confiteor*, is hopefully a familiar prayer beginning with the words: “*I confess to Almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters...*” This prayer helps us to express sorrow for faults we have committed in word and in action. We humbly acknowledge that we have done wrong and also that we have sometimes failed to do good. Then, recognizing that we all need help, we ask the intercession of our Blessed Mother, all the other saints, and our brothers and sisters around us. In many ways, this is a great prayer for reminding us that we are all in the Christian life together.

Within the text of the Roman Missal, we are instructed to strike the breast during the words “*through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault*” (corresponding to the three “*mea culpa*” phrases of the Latin version). Throughout the Bible, striking the breast is a gesture of humility and sorrow for sins. Why three times? As Edward Sri indicates, the threefold repetition of fault “more fully expresses sorrow over our sins. [...] This line in the liturgy helps us recognize that sinning against God is no light matter. We must take responsibility for whatever wrong we have done, or the good that we should have done but failed to do.” Sri observes, “The *Confiteor* also challenges us to consider seriously four areas in which we may have fallen into sin: ‘In my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and what I have failed to do.’ These four points serve as an excellent examination of conscience” (*A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, p. 33, 35).

Form A can be replaced by either Forms B or C, both of which take their inspiration from the Book of Psalms (Psalm 51, for example). **Form B** is less frequently practiced and thus not as well-known. The presider prays, “*Have mercy on us, O Lord,*” and the people respond, “*For we have sinned against you.*” The presider continues, “*Show us, O Lord, your mercy,*” and the people again respond, “*And grant us your salvation.*” This form, the ending of which recalls *Psalm 85:8*, acknowledges that we have sinned and asks for the Lord’s love and mercy.

For Form C, the Missal provides eight suggestions for use in the United States. Each of these involves the repetition of the words: “*Lord have mercy... Christ have mercy... Lord have mercy.*” Each verse of this form begins with a statement of acknowledgement about Jesus, called a trope, usually about his mission (e.g., “*you came to call sinners*”) or his person (e.g., “*you are Mighty God and Prince of Peace*”). These short verses help remind us who Jesus is and what he does for us. Why does the Church offer so many different sets of these prayers? Because Jesus is so wonderful! Even these 24 statements can’t express everything about our loving Savior. Imagine how many different verses would be possible if we wanted to include every aspect of our Savior’s love for us!

As the General Instruction of the Roman Missal says, “After the Penitential Act, the *Kyrie, eleison* (*Lord, have mercy*), is always begun, unless it has already been part of the Penitential Act” (*GIRM*, no. 52). Regarding the *Kyrie*, Edward Sri notes, “This three-fold plea for God’s mercy fittingly flows after the three-fold admission of one’s sin in the previous prayer, the *Confiteor*.” Sri goes on to say, “While the *Kyrie* is primarily an expression of repentance, it also can be seen as a petition, a prayer representing the cry of God’s people for assistance in their lives” (*A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, p. 36, 39).

All this talk about the Lord’s mercy makes me feel very loved and hopeful for the graces to come in the rest of the Mass!