

A biblical walk through the Mass:
Confiteor (I confess):

As we begin the Mass, we recite the Confiteor, a prayer that acknowledges our sinfulness and our need for forgiveness. We say, "I confess to Almighty God and to you my brothers and sisters that I have sinned through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault. I ask blessed Mary ever virgin, all you angels and saints and you my brothers and sisters to pray for me to the Lord our God."

This prayer sets the tone for our celebration of the Mass, reminding us that we are all sinners in need of God's mercy. Sin is acting contrary to God's will, and our sins alienate us from God and each other.

The Confiteor is a rich preparation to encounter God, as seen in instances of surprise encounters with the divine in the Bible, such as the call of Moses (Ex 3:6) and Peter, James, and John at the transfiguration (Mtt 17:6).

We take bearing from the advance preparation of Israel before meeting Yahweh, where they were instructed to wash their garments. Likewise, at Mass, we are called to prepare for this holy encounter, which is more profound than that of Israel of old, where God manifested Himself in the clouds. For at mass we encounter the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist and also we receive him at communion.

This confession was done in a formal public repentance. We see examples of public and personal confession in Nehemiah 9:2 and Psalm 32:5. John the Baptist also emphasized the importance of confession before baptism. Similarly, the Didache a 2nd century Christian text instructs us to confess our faults before receiving the Eucharist.

The Confiteor follows the pattern laid down by St. James, which sees sin not simply as private but social in nature, seeking to repair our relationship with God and each other (James 5:16). It outlines four areas we need to guide against to avoid sin: thoughts, words, what we have done, and what we fail to do.

Through our thoughts, we sin when we look at someone lustfully or brood anger and plan revenge in our hearts. Through our words, we sin when we gossip, insult, or lie. Also what we have done which hurt others and offend God. Finally "what we have failed to do" refers to good actions that could have benefited others which we knowingly avoided doing. c.f. James 4:17. An example is the sin of the rich young man Matt 19:16-26. Note that he had an A+ in the first three parts of the Confiteor but fail woefully in the fourth because he failed to pursue the highest good which Jesus calls him. Thus the Confiteor is not simply what we avoid but challenges us to live a positive life of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience.

Finally, we powerfully acknowledge our sorrow for sins through three ways: we don't simply say "I have sinned" but that "I have greatly sinned," indicating the gravity of our sins. We take responsibility for our actions by saying "through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault," repeating it three times, and striking our chest three times, a strong indication of deep repentance.

May this reflection inspire us to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Blessings.

Father Anthony