

# Catechesis on the Revised Mass Texts: I CONFESS

When we begin to use the Revised Mass Texts in our parishes you will notice a change in the wording of the Confiteor.

The origins of this prayer are interesting, it began as a general confession of sin, then it developed into a preparatory prayer which the priest said before he began to celebrate Mass and by the twelfth century it had become a common prayer sung or recited by priest and people together.

The 'I confess' is one of three alternative ways of celebrating the Penitential Rite at the beginning of Mass.

When we are preparing ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries we are conscious that when we come into the awesome presence of God we are keenly aware of who we are: sinners in need of God's mercy. In the 'I confess' we publicly acknowledge this fact.

In some Christian traditions this moment is called the Prayer of Approach. In the 'I confess' we admit our own personal responsibility, we remind ourselves of the many ways that we sin.

We remember thoughts that have led to words which in turn end up as deeds, recognizing also that sin is not always about what we have done but the times we passively stand back in the face of injustice and wrong doing.

The Revised translation restores a closer link to the Latin text, where we say:

*through my fault,  
through my fault,  
through my most grievous fault.'*

This is a ritual poetic way to emphasize our awareness of sinfulness, expressing the sincerity of our contrition.

Some people feel that this will seem artificial and exaggerated, but when I say 'I confess' I am not looking for others to blame or to excuse myself. In owning up, in a variety of ways, we acknowledge that we need to change.

This is the basis of conversion of heart or that *metanoia* that Jesus continually calls us to in the Gospels.

When we refuse to look at ourselves, when we do not own up, when we think we have done no wrong this is called hardness of heart – a paralyzing condition described in the Gospels.

The opposite of hardness of heart is humility, a word which has the same roots as humus – being earthed.

Humility is about standing in the truth of who I am – a graced sinner before God.

It is out of this awareness of our need that we ask the prayers of Mary, the Angels and the Saints and the whole Christian community as our sin affects everybody. This prayer intention connects us to the praying community on earth and the praying community in heaven who are with us supporting us on our life long journey of faith. The priest then prays the words of absolution for all of us and for himself, invoking the forgiveness of God just as when we pray any act of sorrow.

In another other form of the Penitential Rite we use the threefold prayer formula Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy. This form of prayer began as a litany about fifteen hundred years ago, where everyone in the gathering was invited to pray for an intention, this could take some time! Then it developed into a form of invocation to the Trinity where Lord have mercy was sung three times, then Christ have mercy three times, followed by Lord have mercy three times. Interestingly when we look at the sung forms of this, the musical emphasis is on the words Lord and Christ rather than on us.

- *This week you might take time to think about how you will pray the new phrase in the Confiteor and also reflect on what has helped you to grow in awareness that you are a graced sinner before God.*
- *Reflect on which form of the Penitential Rite you prefer and why it helps you to pray?*