

# The Deacon's Corner By Deacon Ron Desmarais

## Have Mercy on us, O Lord

Continuing our journey through the highlights of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition to the Roman Missal I would like to talk about the Penitential Rite. No it doesn't mean we are going to the penitentiary. Although it could mean we are going to spend some time in Purgatory. Ugh, Catholic joke.

The Penitential Rite is at the beginning of Mass when we ask God to forgive our sins and to be merciful in His judgment. This is a time for us to acknowledge that we are a sinful people, but we call on His mercy to forgive our trespasses. See where we are going here?

There are two changes to the penitential forms A and B. The "A form" is a prayer and the "B form" is a prayer and response. Before I continue I would like to tell you that the "A Form" is not NEW, but is in fact an older form. The prayer we have been reciting is the NEW "A Form" so we are not talking a new invention here.

To minimize repeating myself I will use the current form and highlight the changes.

*I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have **greatly** sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, **through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.***

Notice where the highlighted "greatly" sinned resides. The word *greatly* is the addition, and the "through my fault" is missing. However, not entirely as we can see that it has moved to a new location. Hey, it not only moved, but it repeats. So now you are going to tell me that it has changed. Nope! That's the way it used to be. It's the darn Liturgists! They got

their hands on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Roman Missal after Vatican II and messed things up. People didn't like the change back then and it has taken 40 years to correct it. So when Jesus said if you have faith you can move mountains He was talking about liturgists.

Messed things up? What do you mean? Well, what I mean is that when we are sorry for something we do we don't just say we are sorry and it is over. No, when we are truly sorry for something we have done we say things like: "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to do it. Please forgive me! I'm really, really sorry!" That's what I mean about messing things up.

During this Rite we are truly pleading with God to forgive our sins. We really want him to forgive us. We are so sorry we are calling on the Angels, Christ's mother, the Saints, and our brothers and sisters in the Catholic faith to echo our plea for forgiveness. So the fact that we repeat our plea is actually a normal thing to do. Only saying it once is kind of like saying, "Well, I told you I was sorry, can't we just move along?" Why would I want to forgive someone who didn't sound sincere?

The second Penitential form B is a more significant change, but not radically so. The current form is:

*Priest: Lord, we have sinned against you:*

*Lord, have mercy.*

*People: Lord, have mercy.*

*Priest: Lord, show us your mercy and love.*

*People: And grant us your salvation.*

The revised form is:

*Priest: Have mercy on us, O Lord.*

*People: For we have sinned against you.*

*Priest: Show us, O Lord, your mercy.*

*People: And grant us your salvation.*

It doesn't appear to be too much different does it? A few words change here and there. It even looks a little shorter. However, the significant change is in verses one and two. Can you spot the difference? Okay, here it is: they are reversed.

Notice the priest calls on God to have Mercy on himself and on the rest of us. This is in conformance with a priestly role. Just as Moses called out to God to have mercy on the disobedient Israelites after they turned to the Golden Calf. *"If I find favor with you, O Lord, do come along in our company. This is indeed a stiff-necked people; yet pardon our wickedness and sins, and receive us as your own."* (Ex 34:9) Or the long discourse of Abraham pleading with God to spare the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:23-32) whittling Him down from 50 righteous people to 10 righteous people.

The second line, *"For we have sinned against you"* is our acknowledgement to God that we have sinned. Echoing scripture just as the prodigal son acknowledged his sin against his father, *"Father I have sinned against heaven and against you."* (Luke 15:18)

The priest continues with another plea for God to have mercy. We respond with, "And grant us your salvation." This is our plea to be saved. So the next time a Protestant asks you, "Have you been saved?" You can reply that you have said the sinner's prayer. Neither one of you will know if you have been saved until you get to heaven, but you don't have to tell them that. The "sinner's prayer" is just a longer version of what you just said. They will probably reply, "Praise the Lord!" and you can say it too. They will go away happy thinking you are born again and you can go away happy because they will leave you alone. They will tell people you're a Catholic, but have been saved. Do I hear an Amen?

These are the changes to the penitential rite that we will be saying come Advent. We will be spending a lot of time reading the missal and trying to follow along with the correct response. Yep, we are going to mess up. We'll be embarrassed, but you won't be alone. In a little while you will have it down pat and won't even think about the way *"we used to say it."*

Oh, did I tell you about hitting your breast three times instead of once when we say, "Through my fault." I don't know if we will be instructed to do so until I see the missal at Advent. But I wouldn't be surprised if the bishops want us to do that as well.

Some people won't like it, but I think it is appropriate and goes with the intentions of our plea to God. You don't have to do as that is your call. I don't think God will turn you away because you didn't. But if I were asking someone to forgive me I'd try to do something that showed I was sincere in my request.

Remember during this portion of the Mass we are cleansing ourselves in preparation to enter into the presence of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Just as the Jewish priests cleansed themselves to enter into the Holy of Holies in the Temple so we cleanse ourselves in preparation to receive Christ in the Eucharist. Later we will see in a more visible way the priest cleansing himself during the preparatory prayers before the consecration of the bread and wine.

Well that concludes my thoughts on the Penitential Rite in the revised Roman Missal. I hope that you will think about what is taking place during this portion of the Mass, that you will reflect on your sincerity in requesting forgiveness from God.