



Fr. Daniel's Corner

Mass Moment: Part 6

The Penitential Act: Kyrie, Lord have mercy

In the Penitential Act, the priest calls upon the congregation, including himself, to reflect on their sins and ask God to forgive them, so that they may be spiritually purified for the celebration of the liturgy. Thus, “so that we may celebrate these sacred mysteries worthily.” From time to time on Sundays, especially in Easter Time, instead of the customary Penitential Act, the blessing and sprinkling of water may take place as a reminder of Baptism. This is “Asperge Me” derived from Psalm 51:9 (Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure; wash me, make whiter than snow).

It is important that in the face of the sacred action that is beginning awakens in us a keen sense of how our sins stand in striking contrast to what we are about to do. We are in the presence of the all holy God, and as a first reaction to finding ourselves there, what can we do except to beg Him for mercy? What could we ever hope to understand of the inspired word of God that is about to be read if we did not confess our sins before Him and ask for mercy? How could we ever hope to enter into communion with the sacrifice of Christ if we were to approach it as something to which we had a right? No, we draw near to the word, we draw near to the altar with repentance.

There are different formulas used for the Penitential Act: the Confiteor (I confess), sample invocations (Lord Jesus, you are...), Lord, have mercy. The most commonly used is Kyrie- Lord have mercy. The kyrie is a song by which the people and the choir acclaim the Lord and implore his mercy. According to Pope Benedict XVI, “Mercy is in reality the core of the Gospel message; it is the name of God himself, the face with which he revealed himself in the Old Testament and fully in Jesus Christ.” In this prayer, “Lord have mercy,” Jesus who came to call sinners once again reveals that mercy is “God’s identity card.” Mercy is indeed the greatest and highest of the divine attributes of God. In the *Kyrie*, we profess that God is rich in mercy. We also acknowledge our sinfulness and in need of mercy, and therefore, confess the divine power of God who alone forgives.

Scripture relates the theme of God’s mercy in Lk 18:14, the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. “God, be merciful to me a sinner,” prayed the Publican. His only plea was for mercy, *Kyrie Eleison!* The same is found in the story of the Prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32), in the Psalm of repentance (Ps 51), the story of Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-52), the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28)

The Kyrie Eleison prayer, therefore, highlights the beauty and depth of God’s mercy. It shows a loving God who wants to bind our wounds like the Divine Physician he is. Instead of standing in front of a tribunal at the beginning of Mass asking for mercy from a powerful judge, we are face-to-face with a compassionate God, who is ready to pick us up when we fall down. It is an appropriate prayer since we should not ask for anything except for mercy, as we have neither boldness nor access to offer anything as our own. So as sinners and condemned through sin we cannot, nor dare not, say anything to our Loving Master except 'have mercy.'

And that is your Mass Moment for the week.