

PART OF MASS: **Penitential Act, Form A (Confiteor)**

NEW TEXT:

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

Penitential Act, Form B

NEW TEXT:

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.

The purpose of the Penitential Act is to ask God to forgive our sins, so that we may offer the Sacrifice of the Mass worthily. Because the Eucharist is not only a sacrament that we receive; it is also a Sacrifice that we offer.

The priest introduces the Penitential Act in the following words (which can no longer be modified): “Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.” This calls to mind the Lord’s instruction: “Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:23).

In the Confiteor (Form A), there are two major changes:

1. “Greatly sinned” (versus “sinned”)
2. “Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault” (no longer, “through my own fault”).

The new translation is not suggesting that we’ve somehow begun to sin more! Rather, the revised text does a better job of recognizing our lowliness before God, and provides a more eloquent expression of our contrition. Particularly with respect to the second change, the new translation is a more faithful rendering of the Latin text:

Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. Maxima in Latin is different from the English word “maximum,” which suggests quantity or something numerical. Maxima is translated more accurately as “grievous,” which means “characterized by severe pain, suffering, or sorrow.” Think of the strong words of the Act of Contrition: “I detest all my sins.”

In the case of this prayer, a triple repetition is a way of referring to something in the superlative — like adding “very” in front of or “-est” to the end of a word. The triple repetition is a way of unambiguously acknowledging personal responsibility when it comes to our sins. We are asked to strike our breast. This is something that we’re supposed to be doing now, but for whatever reason it hasn’t caught on in the English-speaking world. It would be good for us to start doing this in preparation for the new missal. In the current translation, we strike our breast at the words, “through my own fault.” In the new translation, we will strike our breast at the words “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.”

Form B is not often used; the new translation helps us see that this option is intended to be a dialogue, or exchange, between the priest and the people. The current translation did not make that characteristic very clear. In addition, one can more easily see its origins in Baruch 3:2 (first exchange) and Psalm 85:8 (v. 7 in some translations; second exchange).

After the Penitential Act, the priest pronounces a prayer of absolution:

“May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.”

The Church makes it clear that this is not sacramental absolution (as in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation); we are not praying that God forgive our sins at this moment but that, having celebrated Eucharist, God will lead us with our sins forgiven to life everlasting.

Neither in the current missal nor in the new does the text say that the people should make the Sign of the Cross during the prayer of absolution, as is sometimes done. Normally, when the missal expects a gesture, it indicates what it is (such as striking the breast). Sometimes an extra gesture on our part, such as making the Sign of the Cross after receiving Holy Communion, is a good and pious thing to do. But here it would be advisable not to make the Sign of the Cross, in order to distinguish the Penitential Act from the Sacrament of Penance.

Sources: Some materials, including the logo, is based upon Roman Missal Formational Materials provided by the Secretariat for the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (<http://www.usccb.org/romanmissal>) and Preparing for the New Translation by Fr. Allen Moran, OP., Dominican Fathers, Province of St. Joseph.