



# Liturgical Catechesis

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In this edition, the focus remains on the celebration of the Holy Mass; from the Penitential rite to the Collect.

### 1. THE INVITATION TO THE PENITENTIAL ACT



Usually, after the greeting, and the introduction of the Mass, the priest invites the community to join in a Penitential Act. The invitation consists of the faithful recalling and acknowledging their sinfulness. The basic reason for this, right at the beginning of Mass, is as stated in *The Roman Missal* “that we may celebrate these sacred mysteries worthily”. The priest concludes it by praying for God's forgiveness. This guide from *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* is in consonance with one of the earliest liturgical guidelines, namely, the *Didache*, which states that an act of confession should precede our participation in the Eucharist. The beautiful thing about the Mass, though, is that no one rises to accuse us but we ourselves. “I confess to Almighty God ... that I have sinned through my fault.” For scripture says, “If we say we are without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:9). Again scripture says, “even the just man falls seven times a day” (Prov 24:16). Therefore, the sacred action that is unfolding inevitably awakens in us a keen sense of how our sinfulness stands in striking contrast to what we are about to do. We are in the presence of the all-holy God, and in that privileged position, what can we do except to beg him for mercy? The acknowledgment of our sinfulness automatically reminds us of our



finitude and opens us up to listen to Christ in the Eucharist, who “alone has the message of eternal life” (Jn. 6:68). As Africans and particularly Nigerians, the saying is true that no one dines with the King unless with clean hands. When the king invites guests to his banquet, such honour is greeted with the noblest and humblest appearance; even more it is when we gather around the table of the Eucharist. So, at Mass, we plead guilty and abandon ourselves to the mercy of heaven's court, and to our loving Father whose mercy is boundless as expressed in the *Confiteor*.

## 2. THE FOUR FORMS OF THE PENITENTIAL ACT



The penitential act may take any one of the four forms to enable our transformation from the despair of sin to hope and gratitude for God's mercy: *the Confiteor*, *the “Have Mercy on us O Lord”*, *the Lord have mercy and Asperges*. The first form, the *Confiteor*, is the oldest of them all and, as such, the basic form of the Penitential Act. It invites us to use the ancient bodily gesture of beating our breast at the acknowledgment of our sins and sinfulness. It has the advantage of being communal and makes reference to our brothers and sisters present with us. It also calls upon Mary, the angels and all the saints to intercede for us, showing the union of heaven with earth in the liturgy we celebrate.

The second form, *“Have Mercy on us O Lord”*, consists of two dialogical invocations in which Christ deals with sinners and brings about forgiveness. The third, *Lord have mercy*, expands the *Kyrie* Litany by the addition of prayers addressed to Christ.



The fourth form, the *Asperges*, deserves a little explanation. It replaces the penitential act in order to highlight the paschal and baptismal nature of the Sunday as the Lord's Day. This option is especially suitable for the Easter Season. It is carried out where the priest blesses water with the given rite in the Roman Missal (Appendix II, p1217-1220, Edition: Paulines). If this rite is used, the water **MUST** always be blessed afresh, so that the Faithful could participate in the blessing itself at that particular Mass. It is wrong to use Holy Water already blessed for the sprinkling, as blessing the water is integral to the rite.

### Only the best is good enough





At the end, a concluding absolution is given, which is neither a petition for nor a declaration of forgiveness, but rather, an expression of the wish that God will bring us forgiveness and eternal life. Some wrongly presume sacramental forgiveness and absolution; hence, they accompany that with the sign of the cross. This is not foreseen by the rite! Again, it is not envisaged that the refrain (Lord Have Mercy or Christ Have Mercy) should be replaced with some penitential choruses such as “I am sorry Lord...” or Igbo songs like “*Gbaghara, ghara m Ezinna...*” (Forgive me Good Father...), to mention but a few.

### 3. THE KYRIE ELEISON



Contrary to what most people think, the *Kyrie eleison*—at least from the point of view of its origin and function—does not perform the function of penitence *per se*. It is to be differentiated from the third form of the Penitential Act which has the same formula, that was introduced in the post Vatican II liturgy. The *Kyrie eleison* is always supposed to be recited or, better, chanted after the Penitential Act, even on weekdays, except where the same formula has been used for the Penitential Act. By its character, the *Kyrie eleison* is an acclamation (the Roman Missal calls it an invocation) of the risen Lord whose presence causes us to rejoice in his abundant mercy. As a part of the Mass, the *Kyrie eleison* is rooted in scripture as it is found in the Old Testament (cf. Ps 4:2,

6:3, 9:14, 25: 11, 72:3; Is 23:2, and Tob 8:10) and, especially, in the New Testament (cf. Mt 9:27, 15:22, 20:30; Mk 10:47; Lk 16:24 and 17:13). The Trinitarian formula it has today is a creation of the Middle Ages. In essence, however, *Kyrie* (Lord) and *Christe* (Christ) refer to the same person. Christ is the subject of the acclamation. As much as the *eleison* is a call on Christ to have mercy on the worshipping community, it is, more so, a testimony or profession of belief in Christ's merciful love. As a part of the Mass, this acclamation is to be professed collectively. As *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (52) states, “Since it is a chant by which the faithful acclaim the Lord and implore his mercy, it is ordinarily done by all, that is, by the people and the choir or cantor having a part in it”. What this means is that even in cases where there are verses which may not be sung by all, there should be a refrain that all the people join in.

### 4. THE GLORIA



The *Gloria* is also called the “major” or “greater doxology” because of its length in the praise of God. It is an ancient and venerable hymn of praise to the Blessed Trinity. The Church is assembled in the Holy Spirit with their hearts attuned to the voices in praise and entreaty to God the Father and the Lamb. The *Gloria* is also called the “angelic hymn” because it is the song of praise of the angels in heaven. The introductory words are from the songs of the angels at Christ's birth in the biblical account (see Luke 2:14). It is also composed in imitation of the Psalms of David and biblical



canticles. It is one avenue during the Mass where the earthly liturgy is demonstrated as participating in the heavenly liturgy.

Usually, the *Gloria* is used on Sundays outside Advent and Lent, on Solemnities, and Feasts, and in special or more solemn celebrations. It can be sung or recited. Nonetheless, the nature of the *Gloria* demands that it should be rendered as a song; hence, it is referred to as a song of praise.

Liturgically, the text of this hymn cannot be replaced by any other, no matter how melodious the option may be, for example, the singing or recitation of “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.” It is the duty of the chief celebrant/presider to intone the song, or by his explicit permission, the choir or cantor is allowed to lead. Importantly, this “angelic song” is a community song which is taken by everyone together or alternatively prayed by the worshippers and the choir. The practice whereby the choir or band group invents or composes some (classical) tunes which allow her to enjoy the monopoly of the song is not proper. Accordingly, the choir is obliged to teach new tones to the congregation before its usage in the Mass, as this would encourage active, conscious, and full participation of the faithful demanded by the reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council (SC 14).

## 5. THE COLLECT



The “collect”, also known as the opening prayer, is the prayer that concludes the introductory rites of the Mass. The mood, focus, and theme of each particular Mass are summarized in and through this prayer. With arms outstretched, the priest invites the community to prayer with the words 'Let us pray' and then he allows a sufficient period of silence before he prays. The

silence is important because having already become aware that we are in the presence of God, we now call to mind the intentions we bring with us to Mass. This period of silence is for members to truly formulate their petitions before he officially leads them in prayer. *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* says that everyone prays “together with the priest” (no. 54), thus exercising the common priesthood of our baptism when we were anointed with the Sacred Chrism and marked as “members of Christ, Priest, Prophet, and King.” (Order of Baptism, no. 62)

While the silence is on, the priest is “collect-ing” the thoughts and prayers of every one of those present, which have been “collect-ed” from our homes for the celebration of each particular Mass and helping us to express our worship in one succinct prayer. Therefore, when the priest says, “Let us pray,” he is not just moving us from the *Gloria* to the *Collect*; he is asking, rather, instructing, even ordering, us to call to mind those intentions that lay deep within the silence of our hearts. Though known as “Opening Prayer,” it is more accurately and traditionally called the *Collect*, from the Latin *collēcta*, meaning “the gathering of the people together, as well as their intentions collected.” The *Collect* is always a Presidential Prayer, meaning that it is always said by the Chief Celebrant of the Mass.

## 6. AMEN

At the end of the collect and other presidential prayers, the faithful respond by saying “Amen.”

The word *Amen* is the Hebrew *MN* which originally meant “fixed”, “settled”, “steadfast” and “true”; generally, a Hebrew acclamation of agreement. It confirms preceding statements both in formal and liturgical settings of prayer. As such, we see it used in the Old Testament to confirm blessings, curses, or doxologies (cf. Deut 27:15-26; Jer 11:5, etc). In the New Testament Jesus uses *Amen* to introduce statements in order to assert the truth of what follows. This way, Christ establishes himself as Amen, the full representation of the truth. (cf. Rev 3:14). Saying *Amen*, therefore, means affirming the truth.

*Amen* in the liturgy demonstrates the communal character of prayer. Liturgical Prayer is not the prayer of the celebrant alone; not that of the Lay Faithful alone,



or that of other clergy; or even that of the particular church alone, but that of the entire Church that transcends space and time. It is both an agreement to what has been said and an articulation of the community's faith as well as personal faith in the action of the Church. This is why the *Amen* said at the end of the doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer is called "the great Amen" and should be accentuated as such, because in the Eucharistic Prayer and in the Eucharistic species is the summation of the entire faith of the Church (*totus mirabile sacramentum*). *Amen* is designated to be said as accent to prayer and as a profession of faith at nine other places during the Mass: At the initial Sign of the Cross, after the Penitential Act, after the Opening Prayer (Collect), at the end of the Creed, at the end of the Prayer over the Gifts, after the Prayer for Peace, as an act and accent of Faith when receiving Communion, at the end of the Post Communion Prayer and at the Final Blessing. It is expected that the Faithful as well as the priests leading prayers—the assembled community—maintain these "Amens" without adding new ones unnecessarily (except at the prescribed places for the Eucharistic Prayer I) because of the communal and universal nature and character of the Mass.



**1. Where does the washing of hands take place? An ordinary sink, not the sacrarium, I guess?**

Yes, the washing of hands at the preparation for the Mass takes place at an ordinary sink. It suffices also to

have a bowl which may be used in case there is no sink. The sacrarium is usually only to drain away the water used for sacred purposes like washing chalices, linens, and others.

**2. Is it correct for priests or other liturgical ministers to join the procession after it has begun?**

Joining Procession after it has already begun is violating the laws of the Mass. No one who has a function at the Mass should join the Mass as a minister after the procession has begun.

**3. I noticed that during religious professions, the sisters who are to profess their vows join the procession. And during child presentation, the parents, carrying the baby, join the procession. Is this correct?**

During Religious Professions, sisters to be professed join the procession because they have real liturgical roles to play as the candidates during the rite, just like the ordinands at ordinations or the candidates for baptism.

Similarly, Parents who have a thanksgiving for a child after baptism (Not Child Presentation or Dedication as some would want to call it) *may* be allowed to join the procession because of the special blessings the child is to receive during the Mass. The reason is the connection that this blessing has to baptism and the appearance of the child in the assembly after the sacrament. No other thanksgiving after a sacrament enjoys this privilege.

**PLACE YOUR ORDER FOR THESE  
CBCN LITURGY PUBLICATIONS**

1. Prayer of the Faithful for the Church in Nigeria
2. The Sunday Lectionary in Braille

The CBCN Liturgy/Pastoral Committee expresses its profound appreciation to all who contributed to the realization of this Edition. May the Lord bless them abundantly. Amen.

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