



Pope Francis on the Holy Mass Part II

Introductory Rites, the Penitential Act Pope Francis

Resuming the catecheses on the Eucharistic celebration, let us consider today, in the context of the Introductory Rites, the Penitential Act. In its sobriety, it favors the attitude with which we are prepared to worthily celebrate the holy mysteries, that is, by acknowledging our sins before God and our brothers and sisters, acknowledging that we are sinners. In fact the priest's invitation is addressed to the whole community in prayer, because we are all sinners. What can the Lord give to one whose heart is already filled with self-importance, with one's own success? Nothing, because a presumptuous person is incapable of receiving forgiveness, as he is satisfied by his presumed righteousness. Let us consider the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, where only the latter — the tax collector — returns home justified, that is, forgiven (cf. Lk 18:9-14). One who is aware of his own wretchedness and lowers his gaze with humility feels God's merciful gaze set upon him. We know through experience that only one who is able to acknowledge his mistakes and apologize receives the understanding and forgiveness of others.

Quietly listening to the voice of our conscience allows us to recognize that our thoughts are far from divine thoughts, that our words and our actions are often worldly, guided, that is, by choices contradictory to the Gospel. Therefore, at the beginning of Mass, as a community, we perform the Penitential Act through a formula of general confession, recited in the first person singular. Each one confesses to God and to his brothers and sisters to having "greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do". Yes, even in omissions, that is, in having neglected to do the good I could have done. We often feel that we are good because — we say — "I did no harm to anyone".



In reality, it is not enough to refrain from doing harm to our neighbour; we must choose to do good, by seizing opportunities to bear good witness that we are disciples of Jesus. It is good to emphasize that we confess to being sinners both to God and to our brothers and sisters: this helps us understand the dimension of sin which, while separating us from God, also divides us from our brothers and sisters, and vice versa. Sin severs: sin severs the relationship with God and it severs the relationship with brothers and sisters, relationships within the family, in society and in the community: sin always severs; it separates; it divides. The words we say with our mouth are accompanied by the gesture of striking our breast, acknowledging that I have sinned through my own fault and not that of others. Indeed, it

often happens that, out of fear or shame, we point a finger to blame others. It costs us to admit being at fault, but it does us good to confess it sincerely. Confess your own sins. I remember an anecdote that an elderly missionary used to tell, of a woman who went to confession and started speaking about her husband's failings.

Then she moved on to talk about her mother-in-law's failings and then the sins of her neighbors. At a certain point, the confessor said to her: "But, madam, tell me: have you finished? — Very well: you have finished with the sins of others. Now start telling your own". Tell your own sins!



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After the confession of sins, we ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Angels and Saints to pray to the Lord for us. In this too, the communion of Saints is valuable: that is, the intercession of these “companions and life examples” (cf. Preface of 1 November) supports us on the journey toward full communion with God, when sin will be abolished once and for all. In addition to “I confess”, the Penitential Act can be performed with other formulae, for example: “Have mercy upon us, O Lord, / for we have sinned against thee. / Show us thy mercy, O Lord, / and grant us thy salvation” (cf. Ps 123[122]:3; Jer 14:20; Ps 85:8). Especially on Sundays, the blessing and sprinkling of water may be performed as a reminder of Baptism.

THINK ‘BEING GOOD’ IS ENOUGH? IT’S NOT. GO TO MASS

According to Pope Francis, a Christian can’t just be a good person and skip Mass on Sundays, because it is the Eucharist that provides the nourishment needed to truly live the Gospel well in our daily lives. “How can we respond to those who say that there is no need to go to Mass, not even on Sundays, because what is important is to live well, to love our neighbors?” the Pope said. “It is true that the quality of the Christian life is measured by the capacity to love,” as Jesus says in the Gospels, he said. “But how can we practice the Gospel without drawing the necessary strength to do it, one Sunday after another, from the inexhaustible spring of the Eucharist?”

Pope Francis spoke during his Wednesday general audience, during which he continued his weekly catechesis on the Mass and Eucharist, focusing on the reasons why we must go to Mass every Sunday, besides the fact that it is a law of the Church, which he said is important, but “not enough alone.”

Instead we must go deeper: “We Christians need to participate in Sunday Mass because only with the grace of Jesus, with his living presence in us and among us, can we put into practice his commandment, and thus be his credible witnesses,” he said. The Eucharist and Mass, he said, are where we find our strength for daily life. Without it, Christians “are condemned to be dominated by the fatigue of everyday life.” Often consumed by worries and fears, this weekly meeting is where Christ gives us the strength to live each day with courage and with hope.

He explained how participating in the Eucharistic communion with Jesus here on earth helps us to anticipate heaven, where it will be “Sunday without sunset”: no more tears, grief, or pain, but only “the joy of living fully and forever with the Lord.” At Sunday Mass we rest from the busyness and work of the week, which teaches us to place our trust in the Father, not in earthly things, the Pope said. In this same way, abstaining from unnecessary labor on Sundays helps us to live out our identity as sons and daughters of God, and not slaves. The Pope also noted an important distinction about Mass, which is that Christians do not go in order to give something to God, “but to receive from Him what we really need.” This teaching is evoked in a prayer from the Roman Missal, which addresses God, saying: “You do not need our praise, but for a gift of your love you call us to give you thanks; our hymns of blessing do not increase your greatness, but they obtain for us the grace that saves us,” Francis said.

Pope Francis then noted that there are some Christian communities which are not able to celebrate Mass every Sunday, but they are still called to gather together in prayer, to listen to the Word of God, and to nurture their desire for the Eucharist. Alternatively, there are many secularized societies which have entirely lost the Christian sense of an “illuminated Sunday,” he said. In this case we must help revive and recover the meaning of the day, he said, which should be celebrated with joy, with community, and with solidarity; as a day of rest “that restores the soul and the body.”

Pope Francis