



Forgiveness at Mass

The Sacrament of Penance is the Church's special celebration of pardon, but forgiveness of sins is also one of the fruits of the Mass. There are many moments throughout the Eucharistic celebration when the texts and gestures of the Mass express the community's sorrow for sins.

We begin with the Penitential Act, which includes striking the breast in a simple gesture of sorrow. The presider then asks that God have mercy on us and forgive our sins. On Sundays, this penitential rite may be replaced with a sprinkling rite, signifying our purification. While singing the Glory to God and the Lamb of God, we ask the One who takes away the sins of the world to have mercy on us. When the deacon or priest kisses the Gospel, he prays that its words may wipe away our sins. While washing his hands, the priest asks God to wash away his iniquity and cleanse him of sin. During the Lord's Prayer, we all ask God to forgive us our sins.

And, of course, the sharing of Communion itself forgives sins (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1393–1394). The main purposes of Mass are to express thanks and praise to God and to sanctify the assembly through Holy Communion. But one of the other results is the forgiveness of sins.

The faithful who are aware of grave sin should celebrate the Sacrament of Penance before presenting themselves for Communion. Reconciliation is advised for all, no matter how light our sins may be. But the faithful struggling with ordinary sinful lives may find assurance that their participation at Mass will grant forgiveness through word, gesture and sacrament.

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