

In the holy sacrifice of the Mass we have an opportunity to address venial sin in our lives, which weakens our relationship with Christ (not to be confused with mortal sin which breaks that relationship). It's a good idea to be prepared before going Mass to more fully participate in this!

Mass begins with the entrance chant/song. The celebrant and other ministers enter in procession and reverence the altar with a bow and/or a kiss. All make the Sign of the Cross and the celebrant extends a greeting to the gathered people in words taken from Scripture.

The Penitential Act follows the greeting. The faithful recall their sins and place their trust in God's abiding mercy.

The celebrant begins the Penitential Act with, "Brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries."
After a brief pause for silence, all recite together the formula for general confession:

Form A — the Confiteor, or "I confess." (Originates from 1 Chronicles 21:8)
The Confiteor begins, "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..." The three-fold repetition of "fault" is a way of referring to something in the superlative — like adding "very" in front of or "-est" to the end of a word. It is a way of unambiguously acknowledging personal responsibility when it comes to our sins.

Form B — a dialogue, or exchange, between the priest and the people. Its origins are in Baruch 3:2 and Psalm 85:8 (v. 7 in some translations).
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.

Form C — the three invocations
The following is an example, but other invocations are allowed as long as the model is followed.
Priest: You were sent to heal the contrite of heart: Lord have mercy. People: Lord, have mercy.
Priest: You came to call sinners: Christ have mercy. People: Christ, have mercy.
Priest: You are seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us: Lord have mercy.
People: Lord have mercy.

The absolution follows all three forms. This is not sacramental absolution (as with 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.

Because forms A and B do not include the three-fold "Lord, have mercy," this will be invoked, 'Lord, have mercy/Christ, have Mercy/Lord, have mercy' (or the original Greek — Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison — may be used). This litany recalls God's merciful actions throughout history.

Excerpted from: USCCB.com, TheCatholicMessenger.net By Deacon Frank Agnoli