



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We continue examining the Mass, in the Introductory Rites. Immediately after the sign of the cross and the greeting, we move into the Penitential Act. It is so important to realize what we're doing here. Without the proper understanding, we'll be tempted to see this time as a time for self-hatred and shame, or simply doing an external rite without getting to the heart.

In all things Catholic, it is always about our intimate relationship with God. While we can fall into a ritualistic mentality, the rituals themselves were designed not as a nod to legalism, but for lovers. When we examine the Communion Rite, I plan to expound this more, but suffice it to say that the reception of Communion is the marriage act between God and humanity. This marriage began in the Incarnation (God becoming man), but was consummated on the Cross. The Holy Eucharist is the totality of that act of

Christ's gift to us – for it is His very self. When we receive Communion, therefore, it is akin (analogous) to the marriage act between husband and wife. No married couple can enter into the full gift and reception of persons in the marriage act without first reconciling any differences between them. So, the Penitential Act is about coming to that place of reconciliation for any venial sins that stand between us and God (for mortal sins, we look to the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and thus become fully reconciled to the God who loves us). Before we enter into the total gift of self ("This is my body given up for you") in Communion, we must first clear away anything that stands between us.

In order to prepare for this moment, I encourage you to do a daily examination of conscience, and also to do another examination of conscience as part of your preparation right before Mass (another reason to get to Church early). That way, when we are invited to "call to mind our sins," we're not struggling to think through these things, but able to lift them in this moment to God.

I mentioned also that this is not about self-hatred and shame. It is not an invitation to beat ourselves up for our failings, but to stand before the God who loves us so much and to say, "I'm sorry," knowing that His love will immediately say, "I forgive you." It is important to remember who God is and who we are to Him. When we see God as our "Abba" (Mark 14:36, Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6), our Daddy, then He's not fearful. When we see ourselves as His beloved children, we trust in His love. Repenting of our sins is simply going to our Daddy for healing, not for punishment or a scolding.

Here's one of my favorite quotes from St. Thérèse of Lisieux:

I find perfection very easy to practise, because I have realised that all we have to do is take Jesus by the heart. Consider a child who has upset his mother by losing his temper or disobeying her. If he goes and hides in a corner with a sullen look on his face and cries because he is afraid of being punished, his mother will certainly not pardon his fault. But if he comes to her and holds out his arms to her and smiles at her and says, 'Give me a hug, I'll never do it again', how can his mother resist taking him fondly and pressing him to her heart, forgetting his childish wickedness? Yet she knows perfectly well that her dear child will do it again as soon as the occasion arises, but that makes no difference; if he takes her by the heart again, he will never be punished.

As we say, "I confess to almighty God..." "Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned against you..." or "Lord, have mercy..." may we take our God by the heart, trusting in His unending love.