

Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water * (Penitential Rite)

The rite of penitence has a four part structure. After an invitation requesting the community to recall its sinfulness, there is a period of silent reflection. A common proclamation that all are sinners before God follows. This may be a shorter and more simplified version of the Confiteor ("I confess to almighty God") with its mention of the social dimension of sin or one of two sets of invocation addressed to Christ and incorporating the Kyrie. The priest concludes with a prayer requesting forgiveness.

Today at all Sunday Masses, including the anticipatory Mass on Saturday evening, a rite of sprinkling may replace the usual Act of Penitence. The sprinkling of holy water is a visual reminder of baptism, the foundation sacrament of all repentance. Although sprinkling is not a penitential rite, nonetheless, every Sunday is a paschal feast celebrating the Lord's Resurrection, which is the tap root of all reconciliation.

For centuries the Roman Mass had no penitential rite. The Confiteor eventually appeared among the prayers said by the priest at the foot of the altar prior to the distribution of the Eucharist, but these were private, rather than public prayers. Much discussion took place following Vatican II concerning whether a penitential rite should be included in the Mass, since the Eucharist, itself, is a sacrament of reconciliation. After much discussion it was decided to place a simple penitential rite at the beginning of the celebration.

* Normally done during the Easter season