

**PENITENTIAL ACT  
(KYRIE ELEISON ( "LORD HAVE MERCY" ))**



In the Penitential Act at the beginning of the Mass, depending on the form the priest chooses to use, we participate in a dialogue with the priest, asking for the Lord's Mercy:

Priest: Lord, have mercy.  
People: Lord, have mercy.  
Priest: Christ, have mercy.  
People: Christ, have mercy.  
Priest: Lord, have mercy.  
People: Lord, have mercy.

Sometimes, the Original Greek form of this dialogue is used and sung as a change: "*Kyrie eleison*" ("Lord, have mercy") and "*Christie eleison*" ("Christ, have mercy"). This prayer dates back to the very first years of the Church and was the only Greek phrase kept when the rest of the Mass began to be celebrated in Latin. (Greek was the Church's original liturgical language, as it was the most commonly spoken language of the day—much like English is today throughout the world—and was the language used in the much New Testament.)

Do you want God's mercy? You should. Do you *need* God's mercy? Absolutely; everyone does. Do you *yearn* for the mercy of Christ? You ought to. We need God's mercy more than the air we breathe. The Church in its wisdom recognizes this need, and so it asks us to pause and collectively pray for God's mercy at the beginning of the Mass. In this action, we acknowledge our absolute dependence on God's love, grace, and mercy, and we ask him to prepare us to hear his Word and receive him in the Eucharist.

The theme of God's mercy is mentioned throughout the bible. For example, in the Gospel reading of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9-14). " God, be merciful on me, a sinner, " prayed the Publican. His only plea was for mercy: *Kyrie Eleison!*

The same theme of God's mercy is expressed again in the Gospel lesson of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Listen to the words of the Prodigal Son: " Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you [have mercy upon me]. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

[For in the end, GRACE is when God gives us what we don't deserve, and MERCY is when God lovingly doesn't give us what we deserve.]

(SR: ALTARATION: The Mystery of the Mass Revealed, Ascension Press, @2015)