

Mass Parts 7/52: *Kyrie*



Ah, one of the few times in the Mass where we still use Greek. *Kyrie eleison* = Lord, Have Mercy. *Christe eleison* = Christ, Have Mercy. And if you really want to get nerdy, in Latin, an “*elemosynarian*” is a person who gives alms, who gives mercy.

If we use the “I confess” prayer in the Penitential Rite (Form A), the absolution prayer is then followed by the simple repetition of “Lord, Have Mercy / Christ, Have Mercy / Lord, Have Mercy.” Form C allows us to expand on “Lord, Have Mercy” with invocations. These invocations express our trust and hope in God, while recognizing our own sin and weakness. We can see this in the fourth option of invocations:

Lord Jesus, you came to reconcile us to one another and to the Father.

-Lord, Have Mercy

Lord Jesus, you heal the wounds of sin and division.

-Christ, Have Mercy

Lord Jesus, you intercede for us with your Father.

-Lord, Have Mercy

We are deeply rooted in our Scriptural heritage in this prayer. The Psalms resound with this petition (30:11; 41:5, 11) and the Gospel of Matthew repeats the same (15:22; 17:15; 20:30-31). The Gospel of Luke also uses this in the Scripture we discussed last week for the beating of the breast, “The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.” Over and over the tax collector simply prays “O God, be merciful to me a sinner” (Lk 18:13).

This prayer has a long history in the Eastern Orthodox Church, especially in Russia, where it is known as the Jesus Prayer. You can read in the book *The Way of a Pilgrim* the story of a young man who is trying to follow St. Paul’s command to “Pray without ceasing” (I Thess 5:17). He learns from some monks the Jesus Prayer, repeating over and over again a variation of:

“Lord Jesus, have mercy on me.” or

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner.”

The first half of the line is prayed slowly as you inhale, the second half slowly as you exhale. With time, you can also try to line up each word with the beat of your heart. Easy to memorize, but hard to stay focused on, this prayer can be repeated continuously through your day until every moment of your life becomes part of the prayer.

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Gloria