

New and Corrected Translation of the Mass – Part 5

The *Kyrie*

Kýrie eléison. **Lord, have mercy.** *Psalm 123.3; Matt 20.31; Luke 17.13*
Christe eléison. **Christ, have mercy.** *1 Tim 1.2; Jude 1.21*
Kýrie eléison. **Lord, have mercy.** *Matt 17.15; Psalms 9.13; 41.4; Isaiah 33.2*

After the absolution following the *Confiteor*, we say or sing the *Kyrie*. This part of the Mass is fairly old. So old that even in a Latin Mass it is said in Greek. In the 6th century, Pope Gregory I explained that this was not a straightforward borrowing from the Eastern Church. The ‘Lord have mercy’ is divided by the insertion of ‘Christ have mercy’ (also in Greek, although the Eastern Church doesn’t do it this way). Each invocation is repeated twice, or in the traditional form it is said three times. Just as Peter denied Our Lord three times (Matthew 26.69-75; Mark 14.66-72; Luke 22.55-62; John 18.15-18,25-27), so he then faced a threefold forgiveness (John 21.15-17) from the Risen Lord.

It is generally understood that the *Kyrie* as a whole is addressed to the Trinity: the first *Kyrie* to the Father, the *Christe* to Our Lord, and the last *Kyrie* to the Holy Spirit.

‘Lord, have mercy’ is practically a standard response to the intercessions in both the Eastern Church and the Latin Church. Instead of ‘Lord graciously hear us’ or ‘Hear our prayer’ – the response of the earliest Christians was always this: *Lord have mercy!*

We start to understand the Mass in a new light when we keep this in mind. We are not simply asking God for a little bit more help for the things we can mostly achieve ourselves. We are not beseeching him for news headlines or to voice the concerns, preoccupations and prejudices of our class or social groups. Instead we are admitting our utter helplessness and our complete dependence on God and upon His grace: ‘Lord, have mercy!’

The *Kyrie* comes after our confession of sins. Our confession therefore has to be a true confession. It is easy to forget this in times of no great need, when our lives seem mostly sorted and ordered. But even then, we are nothing without God. Perhaps we should note, *especially then*, in those periods of seeming self-sufficiency, we need to cry out all the more, and cry out all the more insistently: *Kýrie eléison! Christe eléison! Kýrie eléison!*