

Ad Orientem

Bulletin Letters and Homily Highlights explaining *Ad Orientem*.

BULLETIN LETTER TO PARISHIONERS FROM FEBRUARY 7, 2021

Dear Parishioners,

Ask practicing Catholics why so many of their friends and family members do not go to Mass, and they will likely point to things like the secularism of our contemporary society, the sex abuse scandal, or uninspiring liturgies. But maybe such responses are overcomplicating things. Perhaps the answer is simpler: many people just do not like going to Mass. And when you do not like doing something, eventually you just stop doing it.

Why do Catholics not like attending Mass? Because when they do attend, their desires are often unfulfilled. They want uplifting music, inspiring homilies, and warm experiences of community. Do not get me wrong: I am for all these things! We should try to foster all of them! But they are all secondary. And if we seek what is secondary as if it were primary, we will often be disappointed.

What is primary? The objective reality of the Mass, which is the renewal of the sacrifice of the Cross, through which we have communion with God and with one another. Even if the music is bad, the homily boring, and the community lacking, the sacrifice of Christ is still there. Our task, it seems to me, is to form our desires around what is primary, namely, the sacramental representation of Christ's Passion, which is at the heart of the Mass.

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave us the Mass. Why did he do this? The Catechism (citing the Second Vatican Council) tells us. Christ gave us the Mass "in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages until he should come again" (CCC 1323, SC 47). When the sacrifice of Christ is made present on the altars of our churches here in Kewaskum, we are forgiven of sin, strengthened by grace, and redeemed.

Often, however, it is difficult during Mass to be truly aware of the great marvel happening in our midst: Christ's sacrifice being made present for us.

How can we address this problem? Catechesis is important. But even more important is offering the Mass in a manner that brings out its sacrificial nature. One way to do this is to celebrate the Mass with the priest, deacon, and people all facing the same direction.

Offering the Mass in this way highlights that Jesus Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God, is being offered to God the Father. Who makes this offering? Each of us in the congregation, as we join our whole lives—our prayers and hopes, but also our fears and failings—to Christ, and offer Him through the hands of the priest to God the Father.

The Second Vatican Council's document on the liturgy cites an ancient prayer that says of the Mass: "As often as these mysteries are offered, the work of our redemption is accomplished" (SC 2). At the Mass, we are redeemed. You can count on this. Always.

Those who know they need to be redeemed and those who believe the Mass accomplishes our redemption would not even think of missing Mass. Ever.

After several parishioners asked for Masses offered with the priest and the people together turned towards the Lord (also called *ad orientem*), we introduced this liturgical option at daily Masses a year and a half ago. It has been very well received. I suggested to the joint parish pastoral council that we experiment with *ad orientem* Masses on Sundays. The council was supportive, while adding the caution that explanation, communication, and receptivity to positive and negative feedback will all be necessary.

With this support from the joint parish pastoral council, I have decided that we will offer Masses *ad orientem* at Holy Trinity and St. Michael on the First and Second Weeks of Advent.

Advent is a great time to introduce this liturgical orientation on a trial basis. Several years ago, the cardinal who is the Prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome encouraged priests around the world to offer Mass *ad orientem* to highlight a central theme of Advent: how everyone in Church *together* is awaiting the coming of the Lord.

Please note, this is not the Traditional Latin Mass. It is the same Mass as you are accustomed to. The only difference is that when the priest prays to God, he will look to God, and when the priest (or the deacon) speaks to the people, he will look to the people.

If you have not already viewed my YouTube videos that offer a more thorough explanation of the meaning communicated by liturgical orientation, I encourage you to do so. Also, I am more than happy to talk about this! Give me a holler!

Before I walk out of the sacristy at Holy Trinity to begin Mass, I read the words engraved on the vesting cabinet, which come from the Gospel of St. John: He loved them to the end. At the Mass, we relive, in a ritual manner, Christ loving us to the end by giving up his Body and Blood for our salvation. If offering Mass with everyone facing the same direction underscores this reality and thus helps us meditate upon such perfect love, then it is most definitely worth a try!

In Christ,

Father Strand

BULLETIN LETTER TO PARISHIONERS FROM NOVEMBER 15, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

During the first two weeks of Advent last December, we introduced *ad orientem* (towards the east) Masses on Sundays. At these Masses, generally speaking, the priest faces the people when he speaks to the people and he faces God when he prays to God.

I asked for feedback after this trial run. A couple parishioners expressed to me some of their concerns with this prayer orientation; however, most comments were very positive and supportive.

Several people expressed to me that they thought Mass offered *ad orientem* emphasized the “togetherness” of the offering. They told me that experiencing Mass offered in this way encouraged them to avoid simply watching the priest and listening to him. Rather, they were reminded that praying the Mass well necessitated something more: joining the offering of their

lives to Christ as *together* the Church offers the Sacrifice of Christ to God the Father through the hands of the priest. This all makes sense because Mass is not just about what the priest is doing exteriorly; it's also about what each person is doing in his or her your heart. People told me that they previously did not realize the Church was giving them so much responsibility at Mass.

The theological foundation of this observation comes from the fact that every baptized Catholic is baptized into the person of Christ, who is priest, prophet, and king. Most Catholics know about the ministerial (or hierarchical) priesthood, which configures a man to act in the Person of Christ the Head. But, unfortunately, many do not know that every baptized Catholic shares in what we call the common (or royal) priesthood of Christ. The Church teaches that, although the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful differ in essence and degree, they are still deeply interrelated:

“The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. ***But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity***” (LG 10).

Ad orientem worship highlights this teaching of the Church, which is an important teaching when considering the large number of Catholics who stop regularly attending Mass every year in our country. Did any of these fallen away Catholics ever appreciate the responsibility and privilege that was theirs to exercise their “royal” priesthood at Mass, not merely by passively watching the priest (which is rather boring!), but by interiorly assisting him while he offers the Eucharist? It seems if they did, they might not have left.

The Pastoral Council recently reviewed the Advent *ad orientem* experience. One comment that several members heard from parishioners was that the microphone needs to be louder so people who typically rely partially upon lip reading would be able to follow along. Members also expressed that some parishioners are so accustomed to the priest facing the people after experiencing this for 50 years, they really don't want to change the style of Mass to which they have become accustomed.

Taking all this into consideration, *some* Masses will again be offered in the *ad orientem* style this Lent in hopes of providing more opportunities for parishioners to build upon their experience last Advent. For the six weeks of Lent, the 9am and 11am Masses will be offered *ad orientem*, whereas for the 4pm and the 7:30am Masses, the priest will continue to face the people. To help remind parishioners how to best engage *ad orientem* Mass, I have produced a trifold pamphlet with seven considerations to better pray Mass offered in the the *ad orientem* manner. These pamphlets are included in the print bulletins and will be provided at the 9am and 11am Masses during Lent.

As always, please don't hesitate to share your experience of praying at Mass with me. Worshipping God is the most important thing we do so we should try to do it very well!

In Christ,

Father Strand

HOMILY HIGHLIGHTS

“Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.”

A couple weeks ago, I explained that after consultation with the pastoral council, Masses on the 1st and 2nd Sundays of Advent would be offered in the *ad orientem* manner. What this means is very simple. Anytime I pray a prayer to God, I will look towards God. Anytime I speak to you, I will look to you.

At the outset, please note two things: First, the rest of the Mass will be exactly the same. This is not the “old” Mass that some of you remember from your childhood. Second, this is a perfectly licit way to offer the Mass. In fact, the Roman Missal suggests that this way is actually standard.

Why are we giving this a try? In short, because I think it might help us turn our hearts to God.

In the 3rd chapter of Genesis, we hear the story of the sin of Adam. This is the story of man turning away from God. We are all descendants of Adam. And so we too are tempted to turn away from God.

Whenever we turn away from God, we inevitably will turn towards something else, usually in an unhealthy way. We may turn towards winning the praise of others, we may turn towards pleasures and comforts, we may turn towards obsessing over the faults of others. When we turn away from God, we turn towards all sorts of things that, in the end, only make us sad.

And so our task is obvious—we need to turn our hearts towards God. **“Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved”**

The Mass is a privileged moment for us to turn our hearts to God. At Mass we turn our hearts to God bringing Him our intentions, our praise and thanksgiving, and even our sins.

And yet, I think many agree that at times it doesn’t seem that our hearts are being turned back to God at Mass. At times, you might feel that you are stuck in a rut when you come to Mass. And, as we all know, when we are stuck in a rut, a little change can often do us good.

I remember my sophomore year of high school football, our JV team was getting ready for a big game against Hartland Arrowhead. Now we were a running team and typically did well when we kept the ball on the ground. But we were in a rut. And we also were guessing that Arrowhead had our number.

Our coaches came to realize that we were limiting our potential by running the ball so much. They realized that we had the potential to throw the ball as well. And so, the week before the big game, we implemented an entirely new offensive formation that had 5 guys all running routes as eligible receivers.

Now the first few days of working out of this new formation at practice were a bit challenging. But with time, it became natural, and what we saw is that all of us were actualizing more of our potential, more of our skills than we had ever done before.

When the big game came around, Arrowhead was caught off guard, we had more passing yardage than ever before, and we won handily.

When you come to Mass, you may feel that you are stuck in a rut. You come and watch, you come and listen, but it's just not satisfying. Perhaps the problem is that you are limiting yourself by just watching the priest and listening to him. Perhaps you are not actualizing your potential as a baptized Catholic. Perhaps a small change would make a big difference.

Offering Mass *ad orientem* is a small change, but my hope is that it will make a big difference in the way you pray at Mass. My hope is that this will be an invitation to you not just to watch me, but rather to assist me; not just to listen to me, but rather to pray with me.

And in so doing, it would help all of us, together, us turn our hearts to God, who came to us 2,000 years ago, who will come again at the end of time, and who comes to us today, right now, at this Mass.

When I offer the Mass in this manner, I've noticed something very beautiful. When I elevate the chalice at the consecration, on the polished gold cup of the chalice, I can see a miniature reflected image of every person at that Mass in the pews. That chalice contains the entirety of our lives united to Christ—our hopes and joys, our worries and anxieties, our prayers of sorrow and thanksgiving.

And at that climactic moment, through my unworthy hands, the whole Church united in Christ, makes this offering to God the Father. At that moment, all of us together turn our hearts to God in praise and thanksgiving. At that moment, the psalmist's prayer is answered: **“Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.”**

