

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 re-presentation 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