

AD ORIENTEM AT GOOD SHEPHERD: A SUMMARY

This Advent and Christmas, we will celebrate our Masses at Good Shepherd *ad orientem*, with the priest and the people facing the same direction during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Most of the time, we celebrate Mass *versus populum*, with the priest and the people facing each other. *Ad orientem* is particularly appropriate to begin during the Season of Advent, as we look with longing and anticipation to Christ's coming in glory. If you would like a more complete explanation of this way of praying, please read my letter titled *People, Look East*, which will be available during the First Week of Advent.

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What will these Masses look like? I would like to say that most of our time together will be normal, but very little is normal right now. We still have no congregational singing, no shared sign of peace. So instead, I will say that most of our time together will be unchanged.

Introductory Rites

The priest and any other ministers will process into the church and to the sanctuary as normal. They will genuflect, ascend the sanctuary steps, reverence the altar, and go to their chairs as normal. Mass will begin in the regular way, with the Sign of the Cross, Penitential Act, Gloria (when prescribed), and Collect all looking the same during Advent as they did during Ordinary Time.

The Liturgy of the Word

The proclamation of the First Reading, the Responsorial Psalm, the Second Reading, the Gospel Acclamation, and the Gospel; the delivery of the Homily; and the praying of the Creed and Universal Prayer (the petitions) will all be unchanged. The only difference we will see during the Liturgy of the Word will be the side of the altar that the priest and deacon pass on the way from the chair to the ambo and back.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The first marked difference will happen at the Offertory, as the priest and ministers prepare the altar and the gifts on the side of the altar closer to the congregation. When the priest offers the bread and wine, he will face East, offering the gifts to God the Father through Jesus Christ. When the priest invites the people to pray that his sacrifice and theirs will be acceptable to God, the almighty Father, he will turn toward them for the invitation. Then, he will turn back toward the Lord to pray the Prayer over the Offerings. From that point, the priest will face the Lord through the entire Eucharistic Prayer, which concludes with offering the Father the Body and Blood of Christ through Christ and with him and in him.

The Communion Rite

Following the Lord's Prayer and its related prayers, the priest will turn toward the congregation to offer them the peace of the Lord. After the exchange of peace, the priest will turn back around to complete the prayers before Holy Communion. Then, holding the Sacred Host and Precious Chalice, he will turn toward the people to invite them to behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He will turn back to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Distribution of Holy Communion will take place as usual, as will the Prayer After Communion.

The Concluding Rites

Announcements, the Final Blessing, and the Dismissal will all take place in the usual way.

These changes basically come down to the priest facing those he is addressing. He faces the people when he is speaking to the people and he faces *ad orientem* when he is speaking to the Lord. Keeping this in mind helps us address one of the primary criticisms about *ad orientem* Mass – that the priest turning his back to the people. Technically and physically, that is what happens. But to say that the priest is turning his back to the people is to mischaracterize that movement. It is not a matter of turning away from the people out of neglect or disdain for them; it is a matter of turning toward the Lord, to whom the prayers are addressed and the sacrifice is offered.

I am hopeful that our celebration of Mass in this way will bear great fruit in our spiritual lives. Encountering, investigating, and embracing Mass celebrated *ad orientem* has had a profound impact on my understanding and love of the Mass. Here are some of the reasons why I am excited for you to experience *ad orientem* Mass:

- Mass celebrated *ad orientem* can make the sacrificial nature of the Mass more visible, highlighting that the priest and the people are united in a single action, offering one sacrifice to God.
- Mass celebrated *ad orientem* can reinforce the reality that when we celebrate Mass our primary purpose is not to talk *about* God (though some of that happens) but to talk *to* God. We are there to offer our adoration, thanksgiving, atonement, and petition to God. When we are at Mass, we are not the audience. God is the audience – the recipient of our actions, our prayers, our offering, our sacrifice.
- Mass celebrated *ad orientem* can help us heed the call of the Second Vatican Council for fully conscious and active participation in the Mass. What the Council Fathers had in mind was not a multiplication of roles – not making people busier by assigning them more tasks or responsibilities on Sunday morning – but of fully, consciously, and actually worshipping the Lord in Spirit and truth, with an interior disposition of faith, hope, and love. Being more attentive to the sacrificial dimension of the Mass and the direction of our prayers can help with this.
- Mass celebrated *ad orientem* can reduce the temptation to put undue emphasis on the personality of the priest. One of the consequences of *versus populum* worship is that the priest becomes important in a new way. While the priest is unavoidably the point of reference during the celebration, there is a danger of reducing his role to something other than the one who stands in the person of Christ in offering the Body and Blood to the Father. He can be seen, for example, as the host of a gathering or an actor or entertainer on a stage rather than as a mere servant of the mystery being celebrated.
- Mass celebrated *ad orientem* can help us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is to be our focus at all times and especially during the Season of Advent.

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By introducing this way of celebrating Mass, I recognize that I risk upsetting some of our good people. My intention is not to disrupt the way we pray. My intention is to open us to another way of praying. My hope is that we will be able to experience in new and powerful ways a significant part of our heritage as Catholics – one that was the norm for so much of our history, the Mass of so many great saints, a tradition that has not been relegated to history.

Celebrating our Advent and Christmas Masses *ad orientem* is a significant shift in our practice and may take some getting used to. I recognize even as I write this letter that some people will be in favor of praying in this way while others will be opposed to it. Some people will wonder why we have waited so long to do this; others will wonder why we would attempt it at all. I humbly ask you to open yourselves to this way of praying and to see how it impacts your prayer life and your experience of Mass.

While I do look forward to your feedback and input, I will ask for you to patiently wait until after Christmas before you provide it. At some point during the Christmas season, we will find an opportunity to discuss our observations and experiences.

I am hopeful that you will give *ad orientem* a fair shot, an open heart, and a bit of time. More importantly, I am hopeful that Mass *ad orientem* – whether you ultimately prefer it or not – will help you to keep your eyes on Jesus, the Lord has come and who will come again.

Peace to you,
Father Marquard