

PEOPLE, LOOK EAST!

CELEBRATION OF MASS AD ORIENTEM AT GOOD SHEPHERD
ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS 2020

INTRODUCTION

*Angels announce with shouts of mirth
Him who brings new life to earth.
Set every peak and valley humming
With the word, the Lord is coming.
People, look East and sing today –
Love, the Lord, is on the way.¹*

1. In the normal course of events, outside of pandemic restrictions on our Masses, we would put these words on our lips at least once during the Season of Advent. *People, look East, and sing today – Love, the Guest, the Rose, the Bird, the Star, the Lord, is on the way.* Why look East for the coming of the Lord?

2. Part of that answer may come readily. “Because Bethlehem is to the East!” During this Season of Advent, we prepare to welcome the Christ Child, who was born in that direction. Just as those magi from the East set their sights West toward Bethlehem to find him, we in the West set our sights East for the same reason. We look East so that we may encounter the Lord who comes to us in gentleness, in mercy, and in love.

3. There is, however, another reason to look East during Advent – a reason why people both West and East of Bethlehem look in that direction. For we also enter into this Season of Advent preparing to welcome Christ when he comes again² “in glory to judge the living and the dead.”³ Love, the Lord, tells us that when he comes again, he will come from the East. “For just as lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west,” Jesus said to his disciples, “so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:27).⁴

¹ *People, Look East* verse 5. Text: Eleanor Farjeon, 1881-1965, © David Higham Assoc. Ltd.

² The front page of the website for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reads: “The Advent season is a time of preparation that directs our hearts and minds to Christ’s second coming at the end of time and also to the anniversary of the Lord’s birth on Christmas.” www.usccb.org. Accessed December 1, 2020.

³ Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.

⁴ Scripture citations within this letter, unless otherwise noted, come from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission.

4. The English word *advent* comes to us from the Latin *adventus*, which is a biblical translation of the Greek word *parousia*.⁵ Parousia means “the coming” or “the arrival” or “the approach” and is used in the Christian tradition to indicate the second coming of Christ to earth. So even in its very name, this season begs us to look East for the Lord who comes – to the humble and impoverished coming of the Christ child *and* to the triumphant and majestic return of Christ the King.

5. One Advent tradition that dates back to at least the eighth century is the singing of the “O” Antiphons – a set of recited phrases for Evening Prayer from December 17 to December 23. These antiphons use ancient biblical imagery pointing to the coming messiah to show that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament yearning for a savior. They address the Divine Messiah by various titles and call on him to come. They are called the “O” Antiphons because each begins with an “O” salutation: O Wisdom, O Key of David, O King of All Nations, O Emmanuel. On the evening of December 21, priests and bishops, consecrated religious women and men, and lay faithful around the world will put the following on their lips:

O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice:
come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.⁶

6. This antiphon echoes the canticle of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, who following the birth of his son, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

“And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give his people knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God
by which the daybreak from on high will visit us
to shine on those who sit in darkness and death’s shadow,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”⁷

7. We likely know this antiphon from its setting in the popular hymn *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*:

⁵ See, for example, Matthew 24:3 (**emphasis** added). English: As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately and said, “Tell us, when will this happen, and what sign will there be of your **coming**, and of the end of the age?” Transliterated Greek: Kathēmenou de autou epi tou orous tōn Elaiōn, prosēlthon autō hoi mathētai kat’ idian, legontes, Eipe hemin, pote tauta estai kai ti to sēmeion tēs sēs **parousias** kai synteleias tou aiōnos? Latin: Sedente autem eo super montem Oliveti, accesserunt ad eum discipuli secreto dicentes: “Dic nobis: Quando haec erunt, et quod signum **adventus** tui et consummationis saeculi?”

⁶ Evening Prayer Cantic antiphon for December 21 from *The Liturgy of the Hours Volume I: Advent Season, Christmas Season*. 1975. Catholic Book Publishing Corp, New York. Translated from the Latin: O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae, et sol iustitiae: veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris, et umbra mortis.

⁷ Luke 1:76-79

O come, O Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by your drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadow put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel.⁸

8. The antiphon calls on us to look East to the coming of Christ. The eastward direction of this plea is clear enough in the titles for Christ – Dayspring, Radiant Dawn, Sun of Justice, Morning Star, Daybreak.⁹ And so, we look East with prayerful anticipation for the coming of the Lord.

A DIRECTION OF PRAYER

9. Praying while facing East is deeply embedded within the Christian tradition – most notably, but not exclusively, within the Mass. This directional way of praying did not come as an innovation, but rather springs, like so much of our ritual worship, from the roots of Judaism.

10. King Solomon, for example, after dedicating the Temple in Jerusalem – including its inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, the place of the Ark of the Covenant and the Divine Presence – begs the Lord to hear and answer not only those who pray within the Temple, but also those who pray toward the Temple, who reach out their hands toward the Temple, or who even pray toward Jerusalem, the city of the Temple.¹⁰ We see in this the beginnings of an orientation of prayer toward Jerusalem. This practice continued with the instruction of the Talmud (the rabbinic instruction) to pray toward Israel when outside of Israel, toward Jerusalem when inside Israel, and toward the Temple when in Jerusalem. After the destruction of the Temple, the Jews developed a custom of turning toward Jerusalem during the liturgy in the synagogues.

11. We see something similar in believers of the Islamic faith, who pray facing Mecca – the holiest city in Islam and the home of that faith's most sacred site, the Kabaa.

12. As Christians, we pray not toward an earthly city but a heavenly one; not toward some temporal place but an eternal one; not toward Jerusalem in Israel but the

⁸ Text: *Veni, veni Emmanuel*; Latin 9th C.; tr. by John M. Neale, 1818-1866.

⁹ This direction is also clear in the original 9th Century Latin text of the hymn: *Veni, Veni O Oriens*. *Oriens* in Latin means daybreak, dawn, sunrise, and east. It is the source of the English words Orient and Oriental.

¹⁰ See 1 Kings 8:22-54. For example, verses 38-39 (**emphasis added**): “Whatever prayer or petition any may make, any of your people Israel, who know heartfelt remorse and **stretch out their hands toward this house**, listen in heaven, the place of your enthronement; forgive and take action.”

heavenly Jerusalem.¹¹ When we pray to the East, we do not pray toward a city made by man for the glory of God but toward a city made by God for the glory of man. We pray to the East because we pray toward heaven, where Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father, whence he will come again.¹² We pray to the East because we pray toward God. Praying to the East is a posture or orientation that is called *ad orientem*. This is Latin for “toward the East.” It is sometimes called *ad Deum*, which means “toward God.”

13. Since ancient times, Christians have faced East during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The *Didascalía Apostolorum*, a text from around 230AD, gives instructions for celebrating Mass in the house churches of the time. It calls for the priests to be separated in a part of the house that faces East, for the lay men and women to be seated facing East, and that “it is required that you pray toward the east, as knowing that which is written: *Give ye glory to God, who rideth upon the heaven of heavens toward the east* [Psalm 67.34, LXX].”¹³

14. In Book IV of his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Saint John of Damascus (c.675-749), a Doctor of the Church, wrote about worship toward the East:

“Since, therefore, God is spiritual light (1 John 1:5), and Christ is called in the Scriptures Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2) and Dayspring, the East is the direction that must be assigned to His worship. For everything good must be assigned to Him from Whom every good thing arises. Indeed the divine David also says, *Sing unto God, you kingdoms of the earth: O sing praises unto the Lord: to Him that rides upon the Heavens of heavens towards the East*. Moreover the Scripture also says, *And God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed* (Genesis 2:8): and when he had transgressed His command He expelled him and made him to dwell over against the delights of Paradise, which clearly is the West. So, then, we worship God seeking and striving after our old fatherland. Moreover the tent of Moses (Leviticus 16:14) had its veil and mercy seat towards the East. Also the tribe of Judah as the most precious pitched their camp on the East (Numbers 2:3). Also in the celebrated temple of Solomon the Gate of the Lord was placed eastward. Moreover Christ, when He hung on the Cross, had His face turned towards the West, and so we worship, striving after Him. And when He was received again into Heaven He was borne towards the East, and thus His apostles worship Him, and thus He will come again in the way in which they beheld

¹¹ See Hebrews 12:18-24: “You have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel.”

¹² Helping to emphasize the transcendent nature of the direction is the reality that Christians East of Jerusalem also face East to pray (they do not pray to the West).

¹³ R. Hugh Connolly, *Didascalía Apostolorum*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929. Accessed online at Early Christian Writings: www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didascalía.html. “LXX” refers to the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

Him going towards Heaven (Acts 1:11); as the Lord Himself said, *As the lightning comes out of the East and shines even unto the West, so also shall the coming of the Son of Man be* (Matthew 24:27).

“So, then, in expectation of His coming we worship towards the East. But this tradition of the apostles is unwritten. For much that has been handed down to us by tradition is unwritten.”¹⁴

15. Later, the Angelic Doctor, Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), treated the question of praying to the East in his *Summa Theologica*:

“There is a certain fittingness in adoring towards the east. First, because the Divine majesty is indicated in the movement of the heavens which is from the east. Secondly, because Paradise was situated in the east according to the Septuagint version of Genesis 2:8, and so we signify our desire to return to Paradise. Thirdly, on account of Christ Who is ‘the light of the world’, and is called ‘the Orient’ (Zechariah 6:12). Who mounteth above the heaven of heavens to the east (Psalm 67:34), and is expected to come from the east, according to Mathew 24:27, ‘As lightning cometh out of the east, and appeareth even into the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.’”¹⁵

16. Because of the way the Church has understood the fittingness of praying to the East, celebrating Mass facing the East is one of the most ancient and most consistent practices in the life of the Church. Indeed, Mass celebrated *ad orientem* is a virtually universal practice in the Church – not only in our Roman Church (until recent decades), but also in the Byzantine, Syriac, Armenian, Coptic, and Ethiopian Churches. It even became the practice when churches could not be (or were not) built with altars and apses facing actual East. In these situations, the practice developed of praying toward what came to be called *liturgical East*. To pray facing liturgical East means that the priest and people would face the same direction, toward a crucifix, or the tabernacle, or both – toward the Lord – even if not facing East on the compass.

A CHANGE IN DIRECTION

17. For as deeply embedded in the Christian tradition as this directional prayer has been, we see little of it today. The period following the Second Vatican Council brought a rapid and widespread change in the position of the priest and the direction he faces, even though the Council itself did not mandate such a change.¹⁶

¹⁴ *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*. Translated by E.W. Watson and L. Pullan. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 9*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1899.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. Accessed online at New Advent: www.newadvent.org/fathers/3304.htm

¹⁵ The *Summa Theologica* of Saint Thomas Aquinas (II-II, Q84, A3, ad3). Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Second and Revised Edition, 1920.

¹⁶ The documents promulgated by the Second Vatican Council do not mention a change from *ad orientem* to *versus populum*. This includes *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the constitution on the sacred liturgy.

18. It has since become common for the priest and the people to face one another throughout the Mass, including when the priest stands behind the altar as he consecrates the Eucharist facing the people. This way of celebrating Mass is known as *versus populum* (towards the people).

19. While there are some historical precedents for celebrating Mass in this way, they appear to be rare and generally prompted by geography and architecture – instances in which an eastward facing Church could not be erected.¹⁷ When this was the case, in order that the priest could still face East at the altar, he would stand at a freestanding altar facing the people.

20. The post-conciliar shift toward *versus populum* seems to have grown out of two desires for the Mass. First, proponents desired for the readings during the Liturgy of the Word to be proclaimed toward the people. At the time, the rubrics (the instructions in the *Roman Missal*) for low Masses (simple Masses without music) called for the priest proclaim the readings from the altar. As the altar was situated *ad orientem*, this meant away from the people. Putting the priest on the other side of a freestanding altar would allow him to proclaim from the altar while at the same time facing the people. In 1964, the Sacred Congregation of Rites issued its Instruction on Implementing the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy called *Inter Oecumenici*. This document addressed the desire for readings to be proclaimed toward the people by calling for the readings “to be read or sung facing the people.”¹⁸ This did not change the position or direction of the priest for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

21. Second, proponents desired to foster an understanding of the Eucharist as a sacred banquet or meal. Gathering around the altar, as we might gather around a table, with the priest on one side and the people on the other, would help accomplish this desire. With this arrangement, the people and the priest can see one another as they pray, which helps to remind them of the communal aspect of the Mass. Such an arrangement also helps emphasize that the Eucharist is the center of our gathering, as it should be the center of our families and our lives.

22. Proclaiming the Word of God toward the people, embracing the communal nature of the Mass, and putting the Eucharist at the center of our lives are all good objectives. Changing the position and direction of the priest for the Liturgy of the Word, along with allowing the use of the vernacular for the readings, has arguably led to a more positive experience and embrace of the Word of God. Celebrating the

¹⁷ For an in-depth study of the history of *ad orientem* worship, from which I draw heavily throughout this letter, see *Turning Towards the Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayer* by Uwe Michael Lang. © 2009 by Ignatius Press, San Francisco.

¹⁸ *Inter Oecumenici* 40: “In Masses celebrated with a congregation, the lessons, epistle, and gospel are to be read or sung facing the people: a) at the lectern or at the edge of the sanctuary in solemn Masses; b) at the altar, lectern, or the edge of the sanctuary – whichever is more convenient – in sung or recited Masses if sung or read by the celebrant; at the lectern or at the edge of the sanctuary if sung or read by someone else.”

Liturgy of the Eucharist *versus populum* has arguably led to a greater experience of the communal nature of the Mass.

23. However, these changes in the position and direction of the priest during the Liturgy of the Eucharist have also arguably led to a diminishing understanding of the Mass as a Sacrifice offered to God by the people. An emphasis on the horizontal relationship – what is happening between the priest and the congregation – easily tends to a de-emphasis on the vertical relationship – what is happening between the people (priest included) and God.

24. From the beginning of these changes to the present, voices in the Church, clergy and laity alike, have called for serious reconsideration of the position and direction of the priest, especially during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In recent years, the Church has seen a growing shift to pray again to the East – to pray facing the Lord. Parishes throughout the world are adopting this direction for liturgical prayer, some permanently and some occasionally. The stated desire in many of these cases is to draw people deeper into prayer, to foster a new appreciation of the Mass, and to facilitate active participation in the sacrifice.

AD ORIENTEM AT GOOD SHEPHERD

25. During our Advent and Christmas Masses at Good Shepherd, we will celebrate *ad orientem*. This practice is particularly appropriate to begin in the Season of Advent, as we look with longing and anticipation to Christ's coming in glory.

26. Mass celebrated *ad orientem* is not entirely new to Good Shepherd. It was, of course, the norm here from the time the parish was established in 1946 until sometime after 1970. More recently, we have celebrated *ad orientem* on Saturday mornings since adding that Mass in September 2016, at the Christmas Mass During the Night since its reintroduction in 2015, and a few other times here and there. The exposure has been intentionally minimal.

27. By introducing this way of celebrating Mass to Sundays and Holy Days, 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.¹⁹

¹⁹ The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* does not address *ad orientem* or *versus populum* celebration of Mass. The implementing document *Inter Oecumenici* permits Mass *versus populum* but does not prescribe it. The instruction does not suggest that *versus populum* is preferred or that *ad orientem* is suppressed. The current edition of the *Roman Missal* seems to presuppose an *ad orientem* posture, as it instructs the priest to turn toward the people at various parts of the Mass. Additionally, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has responded more than once that both ways of celebrating are legitimate.

28. So, 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.

a. 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 (if prescribed), and Collect (opening prayer) all looking the same as they did during Ordinary Time.

b. 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.

c. 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 Christ and in Christ.

d. 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.

e. The Concluding Rites

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

29. These changes basically come down to the priest facing those he is addressing. He faces the people when he is addressing the people and he faces *ad orientem* or *ad Deum* when he is addressing the Lord.

30. Keeping this in mind helps us address one of the primary complaints about Mass celebrated *ad orientem* – that the priest is 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; it is a matter of turning toward the Lord, to whom the prayers are addressed and the sacrifice is offered. The *ad orientem* posture is one of the priest being with the people – among them and leading them – facing Christ and waiting for his return. It shows, even in its literal orientation, that the priest and the people are united together as one in worshipping God, even physically with their bodies.

31. Mass celebrated *ad orientem* is not turning around simply to go back, as if everything before the Second Council were superior to everything that has come after. Personally, for example, I am grateful that we are able to proclaim and hear the readings from Sacred Scripture in our own English language, which was not the case prior to the Council. Furthermore, antiquity is not reason enough to make such a change. Nor is modernity reason enough not to try such a change. Mass celebrated *ad orientem* is not a clinging to antiquity or a shunning of modernity. It is an embrace of our tradition, which is “not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire.”²⁰

DESIRED OUTCOMES

32. 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 the people of Good Shepherd to experience *ad orientem* Mass:

a. Mass celebrated *ad orientem* can make the sacrificial nature of the Mass more visible, especially highlighting that the priest and the people are united in a single action, offering one sacrifice to God. At the offertory, I will say, “Pray brothers and sisters that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” We will offer the sacrifice together. And we will offer it to God. By standing on the same side of the altar, facing the Lord together, our unity in offering and the offering itself become clearer.

²⁰ This quote is attributed to the Austrian composer Gustav Mahler (1860-1911), though its origins are unclear.

b. 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. We are the participants. God is the audience – the recipient of our actions, our prayers, our offering, our sacrifice.²¹

c. Mass celebrated *ad orientem* can help us heed the call of the Second Vatican Council for fully conscious and active (or actual) participation in the Mass.²² 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.

d. 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 some parts of the Mass, especially when preaching, 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 the one offering the sacrifice *in persona Christi capitis*.²³

e. Finally, and relatedly, 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.

²¹ We can see something of this in these pandemic times, when Mass numbers are restricted and fewer people are comfortable gathering in crowds. We can see it on hard winter days, when travel, even of a few miles or less, is inadvisable. We can see it when the priest is in quarantine or on vacation or on retreat or is otherwise alone. Whether there are 3,000 people gathered for Mass or 300 or 30 or 3 or none, the Mass is celebrated. In all of these cases, the audience is one – God. The rest of the people are not the audience, they are the participants.

²² *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14. “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active [the Latin *actuosa* is sometimes translated “actual”] participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people’ (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.” Accessed at the Vatican website: www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

²³ Here, I resonate with the following quote from theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar: “An element lacking in good taste has crept into the liturgy since the (falsely interpreted) Council, namely, the joviality and familiarity of the celebrant with the congregation. People come, however, for prayer and not for cozy encounter. Oddly enough, because of this misinterpretation, one gets the impression that the post-conciliar liturgy has become more clerical than it was in the days when the priest functioned as a mere servant of the mystery being celebrated. Before and after the liturgy, personal contact is entirely in place, but during the celebration everyone’s attention should be directed to the one Lord” (Hans Urs von Balthasar in ‘Die Würde der Liturgie’, quoted in *Turning Towards the Lord*, III).

CONCLUSION

33. 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.

34. 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.

35. 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 Luke Marquard
Pastor, Good Shepherd Catholic Church

Given on December 4 – the Memorial of Saint John of Damascus – in the year 2020.