

A Letter from the Pastor

All Saints Parishioners,

I'm not sure how closely you follow Catholic news, but a few months ago the Cardinal in charge of the office in the Vatican that looks over worship and sacraments, Cardinal Robert Sarah, came out with a letter urging and encouraging priests and bishops to begin celebrating Mass "**ad orientem/Deum**" starting this coming Advent, Nov 27, 2016. We will begin this custom next weekend.

So, what is "ad orientem?" *Ad orientem* is Latin and translates as *toward the orient, or toward the East*. Mass *ad orientem*, then, is when Mass is celebrated with **ALL** the people facing East ("All" meaning, everyone, priest and lay faithful, facing the same direction). Why East? East is the direction of the rising sun, which is a symbol of the resurrection of our Lord. East is also the direction according to scripture, from which the Lord will come from when He returns. Having a common orientation for both the priest and the people at Holy Mass gives a new direction and a new focus to the celebration. Instead of being a circle, where people face each other, the Mass has a more upward and vertical focus where the priest stands in union with the people and as their mediator. When a church building has not been physically built toward the East, the term is **ad Deum** (toward the Lord), because the people symbolically face the Lord and His coming. This was how Mass was celebrated from the earliest ages of Christianity until about 1970. The idea of celebrating Mass facing the people was an innovation of the Second Vatican Council. It is not a bad or evil thing to celebrate Mass facing the people - I want to make that VERY clear; we have been doing it for 40 years! However, I also want you, my parishioners, to see and experience the beauty and value of Mass celebrated facing the East/the Lord. When we restored the four campuses here at All Saints I became more and more convinced that this was God's will, the celebrating of Mass **ad orientem/Deum**. Then, when Cardinal Sarah invited priests and bishops to take up the practice in Advent, I felt very convicted. Our four campuses were designed for **ad orientem/Deum** celebrations. The historic altars have all been restored and are in great condition; they are truly worthy, and I think they should be used for the reason our ancestors put them there - to have Mass celebrated upon them.

So, here is the plan that I have spoken about with the Parish Council. We will spend the four weeks of Advent experiencing Mass **ad orientem/Deum** exclusively: Sunday Masses and Daily Mass etc. Advent is a season that "People Look East" for the coming of the Lord. We will celebrate Mass on Christmas facing the people (I do not want to disturb visitors) and then begin an every-other-week routine of Mass facing the people and Mass facing the East/Lord. In no way do I want to create a culture where Mass "facing the people" is looked down upon; let me repeat that! What I want to create is a culture that sees the good in "**both**" forms of Holy Mass. As always, to foster communication and education, I will be doing a series of bulletin articles and giving some extra commentary at Holy Mass for guidance.

A couple of notes about Mass facing the East/Our Lord.

1. Making this adjustment will only affect the Eucharistic Prayer – the rest of Mass (the opening, the readings, the creed, the homily, the petitions, and the concluding rite) will look exactly the same. This is not as "huge" an adjustment as you might think.
2. Please **NEVER say** "Father has his back toward us." This is NOT the case and really deflates the entire purpose of what is trying to be accomplished. We are all, priest and people, praying in union together and we are all facing the Lord to whom we look to for salvation. I will never turn my back on you; but I will stand **with** you and **for** you as your priest and mediator!
3. While some other parishes are making this adjustment, there are others that are not. This is an option not a mandate. So please realize that what you see at All Saints Parish may not be what your neighbor/relative experiences in a different parish, county or state. Do realize however, that there are several priests in our own diocese, and throughout the world, who are moving in this direction.
4. Please be patient and positive. As always, if you have any concerns, please feel free to contact me. I'd also be happy to sit down and talk with folks individually or in groups about this or anything else. If you have negative thoughts, comments or opinions, please come and talk to me, not your neighbor.

Please continue to pray for me, and know of my prayers for you!

In His service,

Fr. Meyer

BULLETIN #1

Father why do you not look at us during Holy Mass?

When I celebrate Holy Mass, particularly the Eucharistic Prayer “facing the people,” I am often asked why I do not look at the people. Do I get nervous? Do I lack the ability to maintain eye-contact? When asked, I always respond the same, “because I am not talking to you but to God.” When I say, “the Lord be with you,” “Peace be with you,” “Let us offer each other the sign of peace.” etc., I look at you (the people); this makes sense. However, when I am celebrating the Eucharistic Prayer, addressing prayers to God the Father and God the Son, it makes NO sense to look at the congregation. When I was in seminary and was trained to celebrate Holy Mass “facing the people,” I was instructed to find my “God Spot.” The “God Spot” was the place up in the air that I was going to address all my prayers. At All Saints Parish, this is normally the top of the pipe organ. When Mass is celebrated *ad orientem/Deum*, the priest does not have to create a “God Spot;” he simply looks at God in the tabernacle or the image of Jesus on the crucifix.

From the earliest days of Christianity, priests and people have celebrated the Holy Mass by facing together towards the LORD or towards the East. It has only been in the last 40 years that Mass “facing the people” has become the “norm.” Prior to 40 years ago, no priest had to find a “God spot” to pray toward. The Second Vatican Council proposed the idea that Mass facing the people could be an option, but it became the norm/rule in almost every parish and church across the globe. After 40 years of theological reflection many cardinals, bishops and priests are questioning the practice. Please realize, however, that there are several places where Holy Mass has always been celebrated *ad orientem/Deum*; they never changed. When I took the young adults to World Youth Day in Rome and Poland we had several Masses *ad orientem/Deum* (including one with Archbishop Tobin in St. Peter’s Basilica). The same will be true when I take our parish on pilgrimage to the Holy Land in June. Also, the five times I had Mass with St. John Paul II in his private chapel in the Vatican, Mass was celebrated *ad orientem/Deum*. This is not something new; in fact, it is very ancient and ever new!

Before he became Pope Benedict the 16th, Joseph Ratzinger was one of most thoughtful and respected critics of Mass “facing the people.” Ratzinger argued that this physical arrangement, Mass facing the people, had turned the congregation and celebrant (the priest) into a circle closed-in upon itself rather than allowing the congregation and celebrant to be a pilgrim people “together” turned towards the LORD. And this closed circle, in turn, too easily makes Holy Mass more of a horizontal celebration of the congregation gathered than a vertical offering of the sacrifice of Christ to the Eternal Father. This flattening of divine worship (horizontal effect) into a self-referential celebration is, in part, what leads many Catholics to experience Mass as much less than the source and summit of the Church’s life. The remedy for this is to open the closed circle and experience the power of turning together towards the LORD.

This can be done primarily in two ways: 1) Return to the ancient and universal practice of the priest standing with the people on one side of the altar as they together face liturgical East, the place from which the glory of the LORD shines upon us. This is what we will be doing for the 4 weeks of Advent and then every-other-week after Christmas. 2) Even when the priest and people remain separated on opposite sides of the altar, to place a cross at the center of the altar to allow both celebrant and congregation to face the LORD (or at least a crucifix). This second reason is why you see more and more priests putting an altar cross in the center of the altar with the corpus facing the priest and not the people. This helps and aids the priest to remain focused not on the people who are there with him but on Christ and the Most Holy Trinity; who are the rightful and true focus of the prayers and the texts of the Eucharist Prayer.

So why do I not look at you during the Eucharistic Prayers when celebrating Mass “facing the people;” because it makes no sense. All of us, during that point of the Mass, are to be united together, offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice of Christ to the Father. This is one grace and blessing of celebrating *ad orientem/Deum*. I hope as you have been experiencing it at daily Mass and on the weekends you are beginning to realize a deeper vertical thrust toward the Divine!

As we strive to honor God and understand Mass facing the Lord, may we remain united and patient!

BULLETIN #2

Why is your back toward us?

As I stated in an earlier column, saying “Father has his back toward us,” is the worst understanding of what is taking place during a Mass celebrated *ad orientem/Deum*. When the priest turns toward the altar during the Eucharistic Prayer, it is not that his back is toward us, but that he is turning to the Lord with us! We are all facing the Lord!

Let's use two other examples about the importance of bodily posture. If I were to sing our National Anthem or lead the Pledge of Allegiance, I would turn toward the flag and begin. If you happened to be standing behind me, the natural thought would be we are honoring the flag together, the singer/leader and the people together. If I led the Pledge or the National Anthem facing you it would seem more like a performance. Mass is not a performance; it is the highest form of prayer, where we worship Almighty God, and thus all of us facing the Lord or the East together makes good sense. Another example is that of an army. If an army general leading troops into war would march backward as his troops marched forward, it would seem odd. The general should march facing forward, leading the troops into the battle and hopefully into victory. As a priest, I am like the general of an army (the church militant, soldiers of God who are fighting for their salvation); I stand as a leader and a mediator, but I also am in the same battle and going in the same direction.

Praying with all facing in the same direction has a long history. Facing a “sacred direction” is a feature common in many religions. (Think of Muslims who pray facing Mecca - a practice instituted by Mohammed and Jews who often turn toward Jerusalem). Thus, the idea of a “sacred direction” has been a part of Christianity since the beginning; only since the late 1960's has this concept been forgotten. The first Christians expected the return of Christ in glory to occur at the Mount of Olives, from where He ascended to His Father, and so it was a common practice for them during prayer to turn towards the Mount of Olives. This practice later evolved into the general custom of preferring to face Jerusalem during prayer, and as the Church spread through the Mediterranean world, this notion further changed into a connection between the light of the rising sun and the glory of the returning Son. The Messiah coming from the East is rooted in Scripture (Wisdom 16:28, Zechariah 14:4, Malachi 3:2, Matthew 24:27 and 30, Luke 1:78, and Revelation 7:2), and the early Church placed great emphasis on this point. In the second century a great bishop, St. Clement of Alexandria wrote, “*In correspondence with the manner of the sun's rising, prayers are made toward the sunrise in the East.*”

For these reasons, since the building of Christian churches began on a large scale in the fourth century (Christianity was legalized in 313AD), they have literally been *oriented* to the East whenever possible, and even when the building could not run on an east-west axis, the apse/sanctuary of the church and the altar have been understood as “liturgical/symbolic East.” Here at All Saints Parish two of our church buildings face actual East: St. Martin and St. Paul. St. John the Baptist faces West and St. Joseph is facing North. Keep in mind that whether the Church is built facing East or not, because the Eucharistic Prayer is addressed to God the Father and not to the congregation, the normal posture of the priest, up until 40 years ago, has always been to face the apse (i.e. rear wall) with his congregation and offer the sacrifice of the Mass with and for them to the Father. As mentioned, it is a simple mistake to think of the priest as “having his back to the people” when they stand together on the same side of the altar; rather, the priest and people by their common *orientation* show that they are turning towards the Lord together.

As we continue to experience this bodily posture and orientation at Holy Mass please be patient and be open. More to come next week!

BULLETIN #3

Are you going to start saying Mass in Latin? It seems like we are going backwards!

No, not at all! In fact, my Latin skills are far from great. I have never said Mass in Latin, and I have to humbly admit, I could not even if I was forced too, my pronunciation and comprehension are terrible. Nonetheless, celebrating Holy Mass *ad orientem/Deum* is not going back. In fact, it is going forward.

When we celebrate Mass all in the same direction, priest and people, we are really just doing what the Roman Missal tells us to do. Now, the Roman Missal is the big red book that the altar server holds and from which all of the prayers of the Mass are said. (On a side note - except for the homily and the prayers of the faithful, every word of the Mass is found in the Roman Missal; being a priest is easy!) The Missal has words written in black, those are the words the priest "says/prays" out loud. There are also words in red, these are the instructions on "how to" say Holy Mass - what to do. It gives instructions on the posture of the priest's hands, the color of vestments, when incense is used etc. In a simplified sense, all that the priest has to do is "say" the black words and "do" the red words.

The Roman Missal, and we all know it was recently re-translated 5 years ago, still tells the priest to "face the people." Why does it ask the priest to face the people, unless the priest is not facing the people? So, the book from which Mass is celebrated, presumes that the priest is celebrating *ad orientem/Deum*. The times where it asks the priest to turn and face the people are as follows:

After the offertory and preparation of the gifts: "Pray brothers and sisters that my sacrifice and yours will be..."

Prior to the Sign of Peace: "The peace of the Lord be with you..."

At the showing of the host prior to communion: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins..."

Notice how all three of these are during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Celebrating Mass *ad orientem/Deum*, only affects the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

One of the accomplishments of the Second Vatican Council was a renewal of the Liturgy. All of the sacraments were revised/updated and much good has come from the revisions. Prior to the Council much of the Mass was celebrated *ad orientem*, much more than just the Eucharistic prayer. When the Mass was revised, however, the union of posture between the priest and people facing the same direction during the Eucharistic Prayer was maintained, at least in the instructions, the red wording instructing the priest on how to pray the Mass. The option was given to celebrate Mass facing the people and most parishes took it as a rule and never promoted nor preserved the beauty of celebrating Mass facing the East/the Lord.

Please recall the goal of us introducing this here at All Saints is NOT to make Mass "facing the people," seem lesser, bad, or liberal. That is not the point! The point is to have a deeper appreciation for the beauty and the fullness of our liturgical tradition and history. Just as it is an option to use bells, incense or to have singing at Mass, it is a valid option to celebrate Mass *ad orientem/Deum*. By taking this option we grow in our understanding of the Mass and our appreciation of it.

I do not like to look at this as going backwards or being "traditional." I like to look at it as being faithful to the Roman Missal, taking all the options, experiencing the richness of our faith and doing something new. So, will I start saying Mass in Latin- NO. I would be better off saying Mass in Italian, but that is not happening either. Thank you for your patience and may we keep awaiting the coming of the Lord together, for He will come from the East!

BULLETIN #4

What are we supposed to take away/learn from celebrating Mass *ad orientem/Deum*?

A well-publicized Catholic author, George Weigel, recently wrote about some of the benefits of celebrating the Eucharistic Prayer "*ad orientem/Deum*". He noted the following advantages in an article entitled "*He's Not Turning His Back to the People*":

- 1) **Worship is not about us** - It would underscore that the liturgy is not about us. The common orientation of priest and people during the Liturgy of the Eucharist symbolizes - or perhaps better, lives out - the Church's conviction that the Mass is an act of worship offered to the Thrice-Holy God, in which we the baptized are privileged to participate. Yes, the liturgy builds the Christian community and its solidarity, but that is one of its effects, not its primary purpose. Priest and people praying together "toward the Lord" can thus be a helpful antidote to the temptation to think of Mass as a ritual of communal self-affirmation—a temptation all too common in the contemporary "Culture of Me."
- 2) **Mass leads us upward toward heaven**- If properly prepared by thoughtful pastors and liturgists, the re-orientation of the Liturgy of the Eucharist would help Catholics deepen our appreciation of the Kingdom dimension of the Mass. The Mass is a foretaste of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem, described by that apostolic seer, St. John, in Revelation 21. By turning together toward the Lord - who comes - now, under the forms of bread and wine; later, as the Risen Lord who will hand everything over to the Father so that "God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15.28) - the praying Church would be regularly reminded that Christians are the people who know how the world's story is going to turn out. That assurance of God's victory over sin, suffering, and death should both comfort us and energize us for our mission.
- 3) **The priest is not a performer; Mass is not a show**- Returning to the practice of a common orientation during the Liturgy of the Eucharist would help mitigate the continuing problem of the priest-celebrant who imposes his own personality on the liturgy, a problem that has been exacerbated in recent decades by the celebration of the Mass *versus populum*—"toward the people."

I will end here with an excerpt from the prophet Ezekiel: "*Then he led me to the gate which faces East, and there I saw the glory of Israel coming from the East. I heard a sound like the roaring of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory...I fell prone as the glory of the Lord entered the temple by way of the gate which faces the East.*" (Ezekiel 43: 1-4)