

Saint Patrick's Church

A Year of the Sacraments
Christ, Catechesis, Celebration

A Parish Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, pierce my soul with your love so that I may always long for you alone, who are the bread of angels and the fulfillment of the soul's deepest desires. May my heart always hunger and feed upon you so that my soul may be filled with the sweetness of your presence. May my soul thirst for you, who are the source of life, wisdom, knowledge, light and all the riches of God our Father. May I always seek and find you, think upon you, speak to you and do all things for honor and glory of your holy name. Be always my only hope, my peace, my refuge and my help in whom my heart is rooted so that I may never be separated from you. Amen.

- Saint Bonaventure, 1221-1274, *Desire for Closer Union*.

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Saint Patrick, pray for us!



A Year of the Sacraments

XIX. Facing the People. Turned to the Lord.

Comparing the Novus Ordo (or the Ordinary Form) and the Usus Antiquior (the Traditional Latin Mass or the Extraordinary Form) of the Holy Mass, one evident difference is the orientation of the priest in relation to the people.

In the Ordinary Form, it is desirable that the priest is turned towards the people during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This is reflected in the instruction on how altars must be built, *“The altar should be built apart from the wall, in such a way that it is possible to walk around it easily and that Mass can be celebrated at it facing the people, which is desirable wherever possible. The altar should, moreover, be so placed as to be truly the center toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns.”* (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 299)

In modern times, this orientation could make certain sense in the way the meal is shared by a modern host with his guests. But in the time of Jesus, the host would have his guests sit or recline on his side, that is, the same side of the table (think of Leonardo Da Vinci's depiction of the Last Supper). Why this orientation? Because leaving the other side empty allow its use for the service.

In September 25, 2000, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments responded to a question as to whether this paragraph excluded the positioning of the priest *versus adsidem* (facing towards the apse, usually *in the east*, where the Altar is), and the response was in the negative. This means that the Liturgy of the Eucharist may be celebrated with the priest *turned toward the Lord* (in the Tabernacle), *with* the people.

Why turn to the east? In Matthew 24:27, Jesus indicated that he will return from the east, and thus the Christian faithful anticipate his coming in glory *ad orientem* (towards the east). Also since the rising sun has become a symbol of the risen Lord, Christians adopted east as a direction of worship. Carefully reading the rubrics of the Mass, e.g. #127, one reads, *The Priest, turned towards the people, extending and then joining hands, adds, “The peace of the Lord be with you always.”* The instruction “turned towards the people” presupposes a change in orientation, that is, not turned towards the people.

Something to seriously reflect on: *Since the Eucharistic Prayer is addressed to God, really present in the Tabernacle, why is the priest turned towards the people during the prayer?*