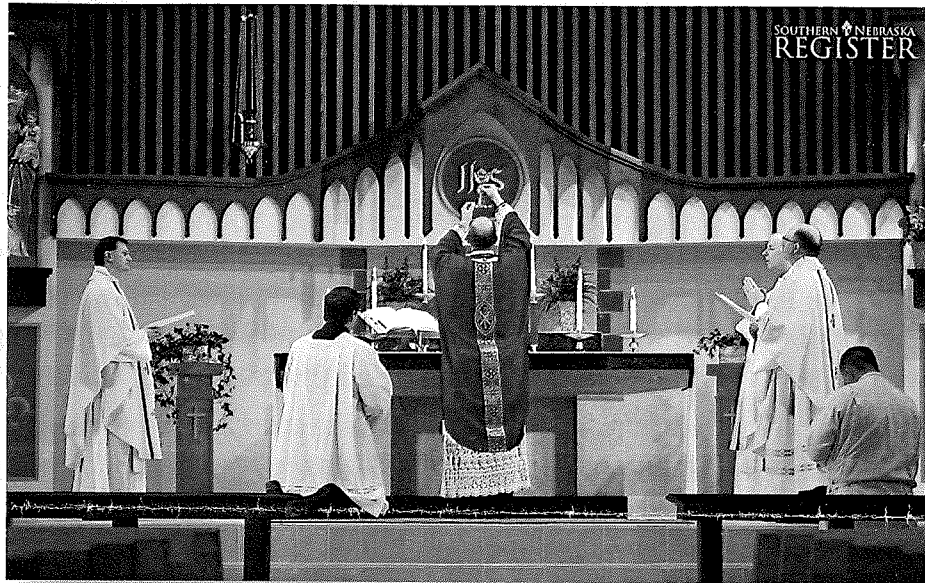


ORIENTATION & DIRECTION OF WORSHIP



Bishop James Conley celebrates Mass 'Ad Deum' (toward God)

***Seek not the face of the priest in the Mass,
but the face of Almighty God!***

Which way does the Priest face during Worship?

"Ad Orientem" / "Ad Deum" → Latin phrases for "Toward God"

"versus populum" → Latin phrases for "Toward the People"

For the Season of Advent, in the Exeter-Milligan parishes, we will be turning toward the Lord (Ad Deum) for daily and Sunday Masses. We will have the added benefit of being 'in-communion' with Bishop Conley and the *Cathedral of the Risen Christ* which will also be celebrating Mass 'Ad Deum' during the Season of Advent and for the Christmas Eve Midnight Mass!

FACING TOWARD THE RESURRECTION: *Ad orientem* derives from the Latin word "*oriens*" meaning "the rising sun," "the East" or "the dawn" with the preposition *ad* expressing the direction "toward" or "to," hence "eastward" or "toward the East" would be possible English translations. Traditionally, Churches were always built with the tabernacle to the East, so that the congregation would be oriented in worship facing toward the East or toward the Resurrection. When architecture has permitted the congregation to face the East in worship, then the Latin phrase, "*Ad orientem*" or 'toward the dawn' was typically used. In cases where this was structurally not possible, then worship was oriented toward the tabernacle or 'Ad Deum,' meaning toward God.

FACING 'TOWARD THE PEOPLE' (the Latin phrase *versus populum* which means 'facing the people' is often used) is arguably a misguided creation of the 1970's. There are some instances of worship services being held facing the people prior to the Second Vatican Council and Fr. Martin Luther in his document "The German Mass" strongly argued for the practice of "Facing the People" in 1526. However, His Holiness Benedict XVI has laid out clear evidence that "praying toward the east is a tradition that goes back to the beginning." (Spirit of the Liturgy, 75) Even other faith traditions such as Jews and Muslims face toward the East in worship.

In some ways, we should note that Protestants, who primarily do not believe in the Sacrifice of the Mass or the *Real Presence* of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist hold worship services where their minister 'faces toward the people', *versus populum*.' This makes sense because the people are the most important thing to look at in a service of that belief type. Catholics, however, believe that Christ is truly present in His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity on the altar or in the tabernacle. Thus, Catholic worship has typically been oriented toward that which is most important – toward the Real Presence of Christ in the Church! (*Ad Deum – toward God!*)

RICHNESS AND BEAUTY OF THE MASS: We can learn to appreciate the depth of the Mass through the use of our senses: we *smell* the prayerful fragrance of incense; we *hear* the voice of the cantor lifting our thoughts to heaven in the melodies of the antiphons and the Psalms; we sublimely *taste* divinity in the Holy Eucharist; we *feel* the wetness of the Holy Water as we sign ourselves with the Cross in remembrance of our Baptism or we feel the weight of our sins and our tremendous need for mercy as we kneel in worship before the Divine Presence of God; we *see* the majesty of the high altar as we direct our gaze toward God in worship.

Additionally we note, that when the priest is facing the people (*versus populum*) during worship, this tends to focus the attention of the people *on the priest*. This can lead to the sin of clericalism. There can be a healthy form of clericalism which recognizes that the priest has been set apart for special work through his ordination and reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. However, when we focus on the priest during worship, instead of God, then this becomes an example of an unhealthy form of clericalism.

CONVERSATION WITH GOD: As adults, we often teach children to make eye-contact with the person to whom you are talking. In fact at the altar, when reverently exchanging the sign of peace with the altar boys, I often make sure that they make eye contact with me. The same is true in worship. It can easily create a theological misunderstanding when the priest is looking at the people while he is praying to God. The great sin of pride tempts us to think of ourselves as God. The first sin in the garden involved Eve deciding to be a god and establish her own church which permitted the eating of the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden (Gen 3:6). When the priest is praying to God, but looking at the people, it creates a risk of reinforcing the notion that Sunday worship is all about us and what we get out of Church, rather than reverently and humbly focusing our attention on the true God. When the priest celebrates Mass 'ad Deum' (facing toward God), he is looking at the person to whom he is speaking. When speaking to God, he faces God. When speaking to the people, he turns to the people.

In fact, the instructions of the Mass presupposes that the priest is facing God when celebrating the Mass. The Roman Missal gives the instruction: "the Priest, *turned towards the people*, adds, "The peace of the Lord be with you always." If the priest is already facing the people, how does he turn towards the people?

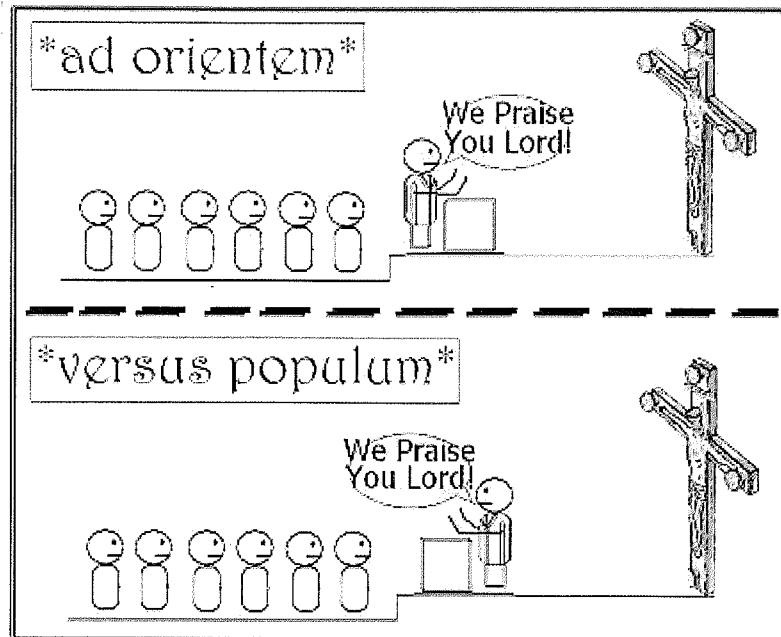
Additionally the instructions note that the direction of the priest offers a *Testimony Of Faith*: "the Priest while turned towards God likewise in the name of all the people, he renders thanks and offers the living and holy sacrifice" (Roman Missal, 2)

TURNING TOWARD THE LORD: Turning is actually a significant part of worship. In the sacraments, we traditionally turn toward that which is important. In the proclamation of the Gospel, "those present "turn" toward the ambo as a sign of special reverence" (Roman Missal, 133) In this same way in our daily lives, we are to 'turn away" from that which is sinful, orient our face, and *turn* our hearts toward the Holy Jerusalem where God awaits us (Luke 9:51).

During Lent we hear a lot about this turning. On the first Saturday of Lent we pray in the Collect that God would "Turn our hearts" to Him. On the fourth Sunday of Lent the Entrance Antiphon urges us to "turn to the Lord and His strength" (Psalm 104:3-4). And at the conclusion of Lent, in the lighting of the Easter fire, the people "turn to face the priest" who is in the act of making the light of Christ visible in the darkness.

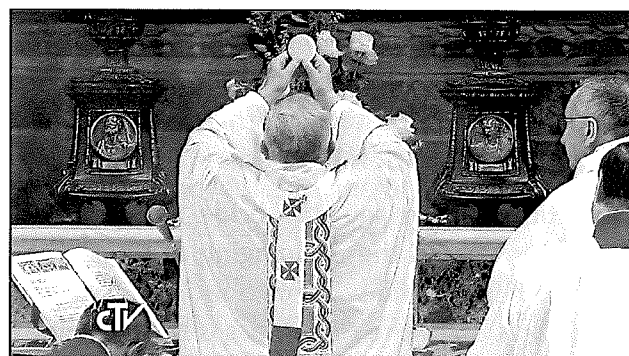
In the Rite of Marriage, the bride and bridegroom *turn* toward each other in offering their wedding vows and the exchanging of rings. They are oriented toward that which they will be united with in the indissoluble bond of holy matrimony – something different from themselves. The celebration of the Holy Mass is the wedding banquet of heaven and so we orient ourselves to that which is different from ourselves – we are oriented or turned toward the Divinity that we will be united with in Holy Communion. The priest turning toward God ('Ad Deum') in the Mass helps orient our own hearts and minds toward the proper focus.

Which Makes Sense?...



This graphic was posted by Fr Dylan James on Facebook. He used it to explain to an eleven year old server the symbolism of the eastward-facing orientation.

When the one boy said that it felt like it was more about God than the priest when he faced liturgical east, it reminded me of my first experience. As I have so often recounted it: *"I shifted in my pew as if to seek the face of the priest, only to realize a short time later, it is the face of God I should be seeking in the Mass".* (Fr. Dwight Longenecker, Greenville, South Carolina)



His Holiness Benedict XVI and also Pope Francis celebrate Masses Ad Orientem Facing toward God!