

Centering the Mass on God

Last weekend we began a three part series of letters on why we have begun celebrating all Masses *ad orientem* at the Proto-Cathedral. The first letter, which Father Harris read during the homily last weekend, focused on why this decision was made at this point in time, and explained the role of Cardinal Robert Sarah as the Prefect for the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. This letter is available on the parish website by going to www.protocathedral.org/ad-orientem and clicking on the first document. This weekend I would like to focus on one of the points which Cardinal Sarah addressed in his statement two weeks ago on *ad orientem* worship. When asked about his goal to make “the Sacrament of Sacraments” (The Most Holy Eucharist) once again the center of our lives, the Prefect responded by saying:

I wish to engage a serious consideration on this question, with the goal of placing the Eucharist back at the center of our lives. I have witnessed that, very often, our liturgies have become like theater productions. Often, the priest no longer celebrates the love of Christ through his sacrifice, but just a meeting among friends, a friendly meal, a brotherly moment. In looking to invent creative or festive liturgies, we run the risk of worship that is too human, at the level of our desires and the fashions of the moment. Little by little, the faithful are separated from that which gives life. For Christians, the Eucharist is a question of life and death!

Cardinal Sarah then goes on to discuss his remedy for this problem which we discussed in last week’s letter, worshipping *ad orientem* during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. For those of us who are very new to the idea of the priest completely facing God in the same direction as the faithful, it may seem unwelcoming and non-inclusive. Those feelings are completely natural, as many of us have been formed subconsciously to experience the Mass the way it has been presented to us for the last 50 years. However, I think the cartoon above very simply explains why there is so much common sense in returning to the way the Church and the Missal have always asserted the Mass is to be celebrated. The next time you are at any Mass, listen very closely to the words the priest says as the various points of the Mass. Are they addressed to us the congregation, or is the priest speaking to God in worship? If you are at a Mass which is being celebrated *versus populum*, does it make sense that the priest says “You are indeed Holy, O Lord, and all you have created rightly gives you praise” (Eucharistic Prayer III), while speaking to us the congregation? By using not only the words of the Mass but also the physical orientation of turning towards God when offering the most perfect Worship of God, the Mass, the priest becomes an instant reminder of what our focus must be during the liturgy. It becomes much clearer and easier for us to meditate and participate both internally and externally on the words which the priest says when we can focus on who the priest is really addressing: God.

I hope that the celebration of Mass *ad orientem* at the Proto-Cathedral will help us all to place God back at the center of our lives on our earthly journey towards our heavenly reward.

In Christ,

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Which Makes Sense?...

