

Locus iste a Deo factus est, inestimabile sacramentum, irreprehensibilis est.

This place was made by God, a priceless mystery; it is without reproof. (Gradual for Dedication of a Church)

In the last of our letters regarding celebrating the Mass *ad orientem* at the Proto-Cathedral, I would like to discuss church architecture and the role it plays in centering our worship around God. A reminder that you can find the past two letters online at protocathedral.org/ad-orientem.

About a year ago, I remember talking to a friend who had recently come back to their Catholic faith about why we as Catholics have tabernacles in our churches. When I told him that Catholic churches have tabernacles so that we can visit and worship God who is physically with us in the appearance of bread, he responded by saying “But God is everywhere?” For us cradle Catholics, that might seem like rather a silly statement, but if we are being honest, it is true! So, why do we need churches? Why do we need crucifixes, statues of Jesus, Stations of the Cross? Why do we even need the Eucharist if God is everywhere? The simple answer to this question is that none of us are metaphysical geniuses. Our human nature has and will not be able to grasp the meaning and true composition of God, His loving power, or how He operates directly with the universe.



However, Christ gave us the gift of the Eucharist because our human nature does acquire knowledge and belief through our senses. The more something can appeal to the many different senses, the more the human intellect can begin to grasp it. We have crucifixes so we can see with our eyes the pain which Christ went through for us. Every time we see a saint's statue it reminds us of those who won the fight against evil with the same human nature we all possess. And, we have the Eucharist so that we can be physically united with Our Lord in a way we can taste and see.



Drawing from these conclusions, we can answer another question which this same friend asked when we discussed celebrating the Mass *ad orientem*. After explaining the many reasons that have been discussed in the last two week's letters, he replied by saying “But heaven isn't actually East, we aren't even facing the real East, and God is everywhere, why does direction matter?” Once again, his statements have a fair bit of truth to them. I replied by asking him if he had ever prayed before a meal or maybe prayed with a group of people in a circle. I asked him to recall how people acted

while they prayed. Did some of them bow their head and look down? Did some of them close their eyes and look directly up? Is God and heaven actually above us? Did they bow their head and look down because that's where He is? We do this when we pray not to 'find God' but to orientate **ourselves** so that we are more mindful of our prayer. This is the same reason that we want both our minds and bodies to be fixated on what our objectives are during the Mass. Are they to praise, worship, and present our needs to Christ during the remembrance of His Passion and Resurrection?

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If so, then we are very fortunate to have a church which is built so that we can center and focus our prayer on God. While people with more knowledge in art than me can debate the downfall of modern and contemporary architecture versus other classical forms (e.g. Romanesque, Gothic, Baroque, etc.), the real issue in churches built in a style that many would call *post-Vatican II* is the lack of theology their composition holds. Recalling the arguments made in the last paragraph, we can quickly see the issue with churches built in a round shape, many of which place the altar far out into the congregation, if not directly in the middle. We immediately lose the focus of why we are celebrating the Mass. Even if we know we are at Mass to worship God, looking at others in the congregation can become a distraction. A sense of *fuller community* takes over as the purpose of the Mass, not to mention that the priest becomes even more a performer or presenter when he is the main focus of the congregational layout. We are no longer reminded we must be moving towards heaven and Christ's second coming, together with the priest, but rather encouraged to

think: what can the priest and Christ bring to me as we center ourselves around the congregation? There was more behind having churches built to have a center point than taste in architecture. It is also important to note that the Proto-Cathedral was built in such a way that there is no need for the Blessed Sacrament to be placed anywhere else but in the center of the church (which is true in most parish churches built in the last 100 years). We should be even more focused on facing towards the Liturgical East when Christ Himself is always physically present in the tabernacle. We are no longer just orientated with our minds towards God liturgically, but actually centering our entire celebration towards the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The next time we are in the church, let us remind ourselves of all the physical reminders which orientate our minds to worship Christ. The gothic arc which was made to lift the ceilings of our churches and remind us of our journey towards heaven. The crucifix which we all face together during the Words of Consecration as we offer the un-bloody sacrifice which Christ commanded us to do. And most importantly, the tabernacle which is centered and remains the focal point of the church, just as Christ in the Eucharist should remain in our own lives.

In Christ,

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