

Praying toward the East is handed down by the holy apostles, as is everything else. This is because the comprehensible sun of righteousness, Christ our God, appeared on earth in those regions of the East where the perceptible sun rises, as the prophet says: “Orient is his name” (Zech 6:12); and “Bow before the Lord, all the earth, who ascended to the heaven of heavens in the East” (cf. Ps 67:34); and “Let us prostrate ourselves in the place where his feet stood” (cf. Ps 67:34); and again, “The feet of the Lord shall stand upon the Mount of Olives in the East” (Zech 14:4). The prophets also speak thus because of our fervent hope of receiving again the paradise in Eden, as well as the brightness of the second coming of Christ our God, from the East.

St. Basil the Great



We turn ourselves to the east to pray. Not that God may only be seen there, for he is everywhere, and is not limited to any particular place; but because our first home was in the east. I mean that dwelling that we had in Paradise, from which we were expelled—for “God planted a paradise in the east, in Eden.”

St. Gregory of Nyssa

You entered to confront your enemy, for you intended to renounce him to his face. You turned toward the East (ad Orientem), for one who renounces the devil turns towards Christ and fixes his gaze directly on Him.

St. Ambrose

There is a fittingness in adoring eastwards—first, because the divine majesty is indicated in the movement of the heavens which is from the

east; second, because paradise was situated in the east according to Gen 2:8 (Septuagint), and so we signify our desire to return to paradise; third, on account of Christ, who is “the light of the world” (Jn 8:12; 9:5) and is called “the Orient” (Zech 6:12), who “mounts above the heaven of heavens to the east” (Ps 67:34) and is expected to come from the east, according to Mt 24:27, “As lightning cometh out of the east, and appeareth even into the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.”

St. Thomas Aquinas



The new liturgy should be clearly identifiable as [in continuity with] the liturgy of the pre-Vatican II Church. Changes, like turning the altar around, were too sudden and too radical. There is nothing in the Vatican II documents that justifies

such changes. [...] When we study the most ancient liturgical practices of the Church we find that the priest and the people faced in the same direction, usually toward the east, in the expectation that when Christ returns, He will return “from the east.” At Mass, the Church keeps vigil, waiting for that return. This single position is called *ad orientem*, which simply means “toward the east.”

✠ *Edward Slattery, Bishop Emeritus of Tulsa*



By this manner of celebrating, we experience, even in our bodies, the primacy of God and of adoration. We understand that the liturgy is first our participation at the perfect sacrifice of the cross. I have personally had this experience: in celebrating thus, with the priest

at its head, the assembly is almost physically drawn up by the mystery of the cross at the moment of elevation. ... For us, the light is Jesus Christ. All the Church is oriented, facing East, toward Christ: *ad Dominum*. A Church closed in on herself in a circle will have lost her reason for being. For to be herself, the Church must live facing the living God. [...]

I believe that it is very important that we return as soon as possible to a common orientation, of priests and the faithful turned together in the same direction—Eastwards or at least towards the apse—to the Lord who comes, in those parts of the liturgical rites when we are addressing God. This practice is permitted by current liturgical legislation. It is perfectly legitimate in the modern rite. Indeed, I think it is a very important step in ensuring that in our celebrations the Lord is truly at the centre... And so, dear Fathers, I humbly and fraternally ask you to implement this practice wherever possible.

✠ *Robert Cardinal Sarah*



The turning of the priest toward the people has turned the community into a self-enclosed circle. In its outward form, it no longer opens out on what lies ahead and above, but is closed in on itself. The common turning toward the east

was not a “celebration toward the wall”; it did not mean that the priest “had his back to the people”: the priest himself was not regarded as so important. For just as the congregation in the synagogue looked together toward Jerusalem, so in the Christian liturgy the congregation looked together “toward the Lord”.... They did not close themselves into a circle; they did not gaze at one another; but as the pilgrim People of God they set off for the *Oriens*, for the Christ who comes to

meet us... Common turning to the east during the Eucharistic Prayer remains essential. This is not a case of something accidental, but of what is essential. Looking at the priest has no importance. What matters is looking together at the Lord.

Pope Benedict XVI

Moving the altar cross to the side to give an uninterrupted view of the priest is something I regard as one of the truly absurd phenomena of recent decades. Is the cross disruptive during the Mass? Is the priest more important than the Lord? This mistake should be corrected as quickly as possible; it can be done without further rebuilding.

Pope Benedict XVI

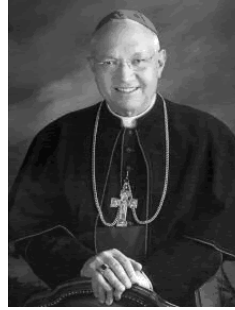
We turn toward the Lord because he is coming, ever new, into our lives, calling us more deeply into the mystery of Christian discipleship. The Lord is coming to call each one of us to become saints. The Church, in her sacred worship, helps us to turn ourselves more frequently to the Lord. This Advent [2015], in the Cathedral of the Risen Christ in Lincoln, I will, once again, celebrate Holy Mass *ad orientem*—facing toward the liturgical east, facing toward Christ, on the cross, and, most especially, turning toward the Lord in the Holy Eucharist.



✠ *James Conley, Bishop of Lincoln*

I'm sure that the day will come when we will turn toward the Lord together, in even a more full way when we all face east, when we all turn toward the Lord in the same direction. And when we do that, that's not the priest turning his back on the people, it's the priest directing the people to look toward the east, to obey the pro-

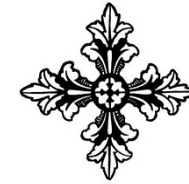
phetic word, to believe how concrete, real, physical and visible Jesus Christ was and is. How concrete, real, physical and visible is the last coming, from the east. The east matters. It matters a lot. That's why the creator gave us the sunrise from the east to remind us that from there, comes the light, who is Christ. As we behold the flesh and blood of Christ, in the sacramental sign of the Eucharist, we are turned toward the east, as Jesus comes to us here in mystery, to remind ourselves that our whole life is an eager, prayerful waiting for him to come in majesty, waiting for him to come from the east, turning toward the Lord.



✠ *Robert Morlino, Bishop of Madison*

It might be rightly concluded that the current cultural climate and its many excesses can only be corrected when everyone returns to a faithful, proper adoration of God. It follows how significant it is that the priest and the faithful face the Lord when addressing the Lord, as the most concrete expression of our desire to configure ourselves to the God that we worship. It is this complete configuration to Christ that makes it possible for us to live the life of Christ, who draws us into deep, abiding union with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Without a vibrant and properly oriented liturgical life, the Church will continuously struggle to convince the faithful to lead a correct moral life.

Msgr. Eugene Morris



SAINTS AND SHEPHERDS SPEAK

about

Facing East



*All the ends of the earth shall remember,
And shall be turned to the Lord:
And all the kindreds of the Gentiles
Shall adore in his sight.*

(Ps. 21:28)