

What and Why “Ad Orientem”

Is a summary of the wonderful article explaining in eloquent and detailed words what Ad Orientem worship is and why it is desirable. But before you read onward, it would be good to read a quick summary of some generally asked questions.

What is “Ad Orientem”?

It is Latin for “to the East”. It is the name that describes the action of celebrating Mass with both the priest and the people facing liturgical east, that is, in the same direction. Some churches are built so that the Altar is not on the east wall, in which case the “liturgical east” is where the Tabernacle is, since it contains the Son of God.

Why East?

For over a thousand years the Altar was placed against the east wall of the church, and Mass was offered toward the Altar on that eastern wall. The priest and the people faced the east since this was the place where the sun rose every day out of darkness. They looked to the east for the second coming of The Son of God who, after the cross, rose out of the darkness of sin and death to bring light and life to the world.

Why does it look like the priest turned his back to us?

The priest turns his back to you no more than when you “turn your back” to others in the backseat of a car when you drive together to a destination. The priest is leading us on a journey to God up the hill of Calvary on which Jesus died. He has not turned his back to you. He has turned his face to God and is leading us to God at the sacrifice of the Mass. The fact that we can only see his back during those moments means that we are following him to the same place!

Why start now?

We are starting this practice in advent because it is the liturgical time where “people look east” toward the coming of the king! We look lovingly at the past to the time where Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us and we anticipate the time He will come again in the second coming. It is the perfect time to have the priest and the people turn together toward the liturgical east to begin worshipping together as one as we journey toward Calvary and heaven together!