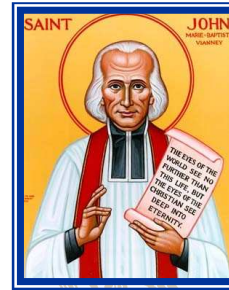


ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER
 Office of Evangelization & Catechesis
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 Denver, Colorado 80210
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OUR MISSION

The Office of Evangelization & Catechesis provides support, training and resources to catechists, evangelists, pastors and directors of religious education in order to help them fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and to teach the Catholic faith confidently in accord with the *Magisterium* under the direction of the Archbishop.



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ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER OFFICE OF EVANGELIZATION & CATECHESIS

Finest Wheat

A newsletter for the New Evangelization

NOVEMBER 2009

Sacred Direction

"If then you have been raised with Christ seek those things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." (Colossians 3:1)

-James Cavanagh, Metro Area Director



If you want to get people excited, or just get their attention, bring up something having to do with the liturgy.

In August Bishop Edward Slattery of the diocese of Tulsa wrote an article about celebrating the Mass *ad orientem* ("toward the east"). One of the reasons he celebrates the Mass that way, he said, besides the fact that it's been the constant practice of the Church for two millennia, is that it magnifies the sacredness of the Mass by focusing on the transcendence of God. In the last 40 years as the priest and people celebrated the Eucharist facing each other, the sense of God's majesty and transcendence has diminished. But, you might say, God is near us, for "in him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28). True, but to suppose that such closeness means that we are identical with God is a serious mistake. God remains, even in his closeness, wholly *other*.

Bishop Slattery opined that when the priest and people face each other it can give the impression that they are talking to each other *about* God, rather than directing their prayers and petitions to God himself. In the liturgy God addresses us and we respond. The trouble with constantly facing each other is that we can become self-absorbed, leading us to believe that there is essentially no distinction between us and God and therefore no need to change; no need for repentance and conversion. The community can turn into a self-enclosed circle. "Of all horrible religions," G.K. Chesterton wrote, "the most horrible is the worship of the god within. That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones. Christianity asserts that a man had not only to look inwards, but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain." Christ calls us to take up our cross and follow him. The cross, whose arms radiate outward to infinity, invites us to do the same. A circle, on the other hand, is closed in on itself and finite. "What corresponds with reality of what is happening [in the Mass] is not the closed circle but the common movement forward, expressed in a common direction for prayer." (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Spirit of the Liturgy*, p.81)

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Papal Intentions for November



General: That all the men and women in the world, especially those who have responsibilities in the field of politics and economics, may never fail in their commitment to safeguard creation.

Mission: That believers in the different religions, through the testimony of their lives and fraternal dialogue, may clearly demonstrate that the name of God is a bearer of peace.

Catholic Author, Blogger and Evangelist

MARK SHEA
 101 Reasons NOT to be Catholic



November 5 at 7 pm
 Bonfils Hall
 This event is free and open to the public.

Other opportunities to see Mark Shea

Thursday, Nov. 5 Catholic Prayer Breakfast at 7am; Seven 30 South Grill, Denver

Friday, Nov. 6 Theology on Tap at 8pm in Braun's Bar and Grill, Denver

Saturday, Nov. 7 at 10am
 St. Mary (Littleton):
 Care and Feeding of the Lay Catholic Apostle

UPCOMING EVENTS

I HAVE CHOSEN YOU

"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you..."
(John 15:16)

Living the Catholic Faith Conference

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26-27, 2010
Colorado Convention Center - Karbel Ballroom - Denver, Colorado

Registration now available
Please visit

www.archden.org/lcfc2010

Featuring a special screening of the
film, *The Human Experience*



Keynotes by:



Dr. Tim Gray



Vallimar Jansen



Dr. Janet Smith

And Q&A with filmmakers
of *The Human Experience*

Bishop Slattery doesn't celebrate *ad orientem* at every Mass mind you, nor does he require his priests to celebrate that way. *Versus populum* is still the norm. But he does value the traditional posture and explains why it's important.

Eucharistic Adoration, which is an extension of the Eucharist, is highly instructive for there we gaze upon Christ together, not at each other. Understanding the significance of *ad orientem* can help us better appreciate the Mass and what's going on, no matter what direction the priest faces.

The essential elements of the Eucharist can be summarized in the following five points:

1. The Mass is a participation in the Most Holy Trinity: In the Eucharistic sacrifice Christ offers himself to the Father in the Holy Spirit.
2. The whole Christ offers himself to the Father. The priest visibly represents the "head" (*in persona Christi capitis*) while the people visibly represent the Lord's body. Priest and people, head and body together offer the one sacrifice of Christ. United to Christ in Baptism we, the members of his body, participate in his unique, unrepeatable sacrifice.
3. *In statu viae*. The whole created order is in a "state of journeying." (*Catechism*, 302). It has not yet reached its perfection. We are a pilgrim people journeying toward the Promised Land; we are a people 'on the march.' Some people think that *ad orientem* represents a step backward. On the contrary, *ad orientem* is a "progressive" posture because it conveys the idea of moving forward. It is not static or regressive, but dynamic and progressive. In the liturgy, we are going *somewhere*. As Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Lk. 9:62).
4. "Thy Kingdom Come:" One of the most common prayers of the early Church was *Marana tha* – "Come, Lord!" The Mass orients us toward the eschatological future as we look with "joyful hope to the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ." Worship anticipates the coming of the Son of man who will come as "the lightning from the east" (Mal 4:1-2; Mt. 24:27).

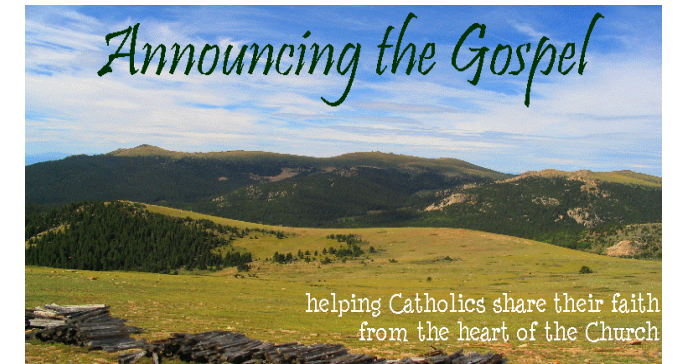
Facing the same direction has been the practice of the Church since ancient times and is still the norm in eastern rite churches. As then Joseph Cardinal

Ratzinger wrote in *Spirit of the Liturgy*, "Despite all the variations in practice that have taken place far into the second millennium, one thing has remained clear: for the whole of Christendom: praying toward the east is a tradition that goes back to the beginning."

As catechists we should understand the symbolism that underlies the ancient tradition, appreciate its value and be able to explain it clearly and sympathetically.

The reordering of the liturgical posture following Vatican II (which was never mandated by the Council, by the way) introduced a new idea about the Mass that didn't exist before 1965: that of a communal meal. The notion that the Eucharist is meant to replicate the Last Supper where the disciples sat around a common table has no basis in history, according to Louis Boyer. "In no meal of the early Christian era," he says, "did the president of the banqueting assembly ever face the other participants. They were all sitting, or reclining, on the convex side of a C-shaped table. The other side was left empty for service. The communal character of a meal was emphasized just by the opposite disposition: *all the participants were on the same side of the table.*" (*Spirit of the Liturgy* p. 78; my emphasis).

Let me be clear, I am *not* advocating nor even suggesting that priests change where they stand when they celebrate the Eucharist. The norm is *versus populum* and will probably stay that way. I am saying, however, that as catechists we should understand the symbolism that underlies the ancient tradition, appreciate its value and be able to explain it clearly and sympathetically. For even if the priest and the people "face each other" during the Eucharist, the *fundamental orientation* is not toward each other, but toward God. "Liturgy," Pope Benedict XVI said, "implies a real relationship with Another, who reveals himself to us and gives our existence a new direction." The Mass is intended to orient us to what lies ahead and above. "Lift up your hearts" the celebrant exhorts us, and we respond, "We lift them up to the Lord." If there is any direction suggested by *versus populum* it is not *at* each other, but *up* to God. ❖



The office of Evangelization and Catechesis is heading to a whole new territory: **the world of blogging**. We are both excited and intimidated by the whole process; nonetheless, we are looking forward to expanding ways we can reach people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and helping Catholics share their faith with others. The world of new media has many opportunities to communicate with the world, but like all facets of life desperately needs the ordering of Christ. We feel a strong call to meet this need casting our small net into the blogosphere.

Here's where you can help us out. Check out the blog, share it with those you think might be interested (family, friends, colleagues, nosy-neighbors, pets...well maybe not). Then give us feedback: topics you would be interested in, topics you think would help Catholics share their faith, and anything else you think is important.

If you have a blog, please let us know because we would like to follow it. Also, we would like to know your experience of running a blog and learn from your blogosphere wisdom!

Check it out and tell us
what you think!

www.

announcingthegospel.blogspot
.com