



In the Christian liturgy, the expression *ad orientem* (Latin for "to the east") describes a particular orientation of a priest celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The literal meaning of the expression indicates that the celebrant faces eastward, an orientation that has been described as linked with the “cosmic sign of the rising sun, which symbolizes the universality of God.” Outside of Rome, it was an ancient custom and practice for churches to be built with the entrance at the west end and for the priest and people to face eastward -- to the place of the rising sun (much like those of the Jewish (Jerusalem) and Muslim faiths (Mecca)). More accurately perhaps, for the Christian faithful awaiting the second coming of Jesus Christ—the Rising Son.

*Ad orientem* was and continues to be used in the celebration of the Latin Mass. With the Second Council’s modifications to liturgical practice, the altar was moved away from the wall and the priest was oriented to face the gathered assembly (*Versus Populum*), regardless of which direction they are actually physically facing based on the construction of the church’s sanctuary and worship areas.

An examination of the present-day, Third Edition of the Roman Missal (November 2011) does not forbid the *ad orientem* position for the priest celebrant, when offering the sacrifice of the Mass.

During an October 2016 Leadership Meeting, Bishop Sheridan advised that the choice to utilize the *ad orientem* or *versus populum* would be left to the discretion of the celebrant (priest).

While many have become accustomed to the priest celebrant facing them from behind the altar (during the consecratory prayers) since the Second Vatican Council, *ad orientem* does more fully orient both the celebrant and the assembly together in offering sacrifice and worship to God.

I pray that you find this information helpful and informative, in the event you happen to visit another parish church and witness the priest celebrant utilizing the *ad orientem* position—it is permissible by the liturgy of the Catholic Church.

In closing, at this time and for the foreseeable future, I do not intend to celebrate the Liturgy or Order of the Mass utilizing the *ad orientem* position outside the Latin Mass setting.