

What are we supposed to learn from celebrating Mass Ad Orientem / Ad Deum?

A well-publicized Catholic author, George Weigel, recently wrote about some of the benefits of celebrating the Eucharistic Prayer “ad orientem/Deum”. He noted the following advantages in an article entitled “He’s Not Turning His Back to the People” :

- 1) **Worship is not about us** - It would underscore that the liturgy is not about us. The common orientation of priest and people during the Liturgy of the Eucharist symbolizes - or perhaps better, lives out - the Church’s conviction that the Mass is an act of worship offered to the Thrice-Holy God, in which we the baptized are privileged to participate. Yes, the liturgy builds the Christian community and its solidarity, but that is just one of its effects, NOT its primary purpose. Priest and people praying together “toward the Lord” can thus be a helpful antidote to the temptation to think of Mass as a ritual of communal self-affirmation—a temptation all too common in the contemporary “Culture of Me.”
- 2) **Mass leads us upward toward heaven**- If properly prepared by thoughtful pastors, catechesis and teaching, the re-orientation of the Liturgy of the Eucharist would help Catholics deepen our appreciation of the Kingdom dimension of the Mass. The Mass is a foretaste of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem, described by St. John, in Revelation 21. By turning together toward the Lord - who comes - now, under the forms of bread and wine; later, as the Risen Lord who will hand everything over to the Father so that “God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15.28) - the praying Church would be regularly reminded that Christians are the people who know how the world’s story is going to turn out. That assurance of God’s victory over sin, suffering, and death should both comfort us and energize us for our mission- heaven.
- 3) **The priest is not a performer; Mass is not a show**- Returning to the practice of a common orientation during the Liturgy of the Eucharist would help mitigate the continuing problem of the priest-celebrant who imposes his own personality on the liturgy, a problem that has been exacerbated in recent decades by the celebration of the Mass versus populum—“toward the people.”

I will end here with an excerpt from the prophet Ezekiel: “Then he led me to the gate which faces East, and there I saw the glory of Israel coming from the East. I heard a sound like the roaring of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory...I fell prone as the glory of the Lord entered the temple by way of the gate which faces the East.” (Ezekiel 43: 1-4)