

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Happy New Year! May God bless you all in 2020 and beyond. This time of year it is fashionable to “look back” at the previous year, and think about all of the interesting events —good and not so good— that happened in our lives and in the world. The media organizations that do this focus almost entirely on the celebrity world. But people can do it on their own, and indeed we as Christians can do this to great spiritual benefit. Looking back at 2019, how has God blessed you? What has he taught you? What has he shown you? How has he taken care of you? These are the types of questions we can ask ourselves. I, for one, look back at the previous year —and as I get older all the years before— and am filled with thanksgiving. God has done so much for me and family and blessed us in so many ways. He gets us through all of the hardships in life, and showers his abundance and mercy upon us, even though we do not deserve it. And I certainly do not deserve his goodness and blessing, and yet he gives it to me, because he is love itself, and because I am his beloved son by virtue of faith in Jesus Christ and being incorporated into him the sacrament of Holy Baptism. The new year is also a time of hope. What do we hope for in this new year to come? Perhaps we’ve made a resolution to do something positive for our well-being. This is a good thing to do. But I wonder if we have thought about what we wish to accomplish spiritually in the new year? What can we do to further our spiritual growth in this new year? Perhaps we can take up a new discipline... increase our prayer time, volunteer somewhere, study the Bible more, attend Holy Day services at church, read some spiritually edifying books, etc. The spiritual life is a life of action... a life of *being* and *doing*. We won’t grow spiritually if we remain in a state of spiritual stasis, always doing the same thing and never trying to expand and grow in our devotion to God. It is my hope and prayer that in the new year each of us will ratchet up our devotions and try to take our walk with God to the next level. The way to begin with this is prayer! For we only grow by God’s grace and help... and yet it is something for which we must ask. So let us ask daily for his grace to grow spiritually in 2020 and be open to hearing how he will lead us, and then, by his grace, follow through with it for a new year where we are closer to him than ever before.

Faithfully, your priest,

J. Gordon Anderson

January 2020

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UPCOMING SERVICES:

Jan 1st - Circumcision

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jan 6th - Epiphany

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jan 25th - Conversion of St. Paul

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jan 30th - Beheading of Charles I, King & Martyr

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Feb 24th - St. Matthias

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Feb 26th - Ash Wednesday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.

Mar 4th - Ember Wednesday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Mar 6th - Ember Friday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Mar 7th - Ember Saturday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

LITURGY: *What is “Ad Orientem” and why does it matter?*

Anyone who has come to St. Alban’s from another liturgical church such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, or a Lutheran denomination to name a few, has probably noticed the unusual way in which the priest celebrates the sacred liturgy: he conducts most of the service from the altar with his “back to the people.”

This manner of celebration is called *ad orientem*, which means “to the east.” It is not so much the priest celebrating with his “back towards the people” as it is him celebrating the liturgy in union with the people all together looking forward to the coming of the Lord. The priest is celebrating the Holy Eucharist facing east whence the sun rises and Jesus will come when he returns at the end of time. As it says in Matthew 24: 27 “*For just as lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.*”

For almost the entire history of the western (Roman) Church this is where the priest stood to celebrate the sacred mysteries. The same goes for the eastern (Orthodox) churches, except that the celebration takes place behind a screen or curtain, so it is impossible to see from the nave what direction the priest is facing in that tradition. (But thanks to YouTube it is possible for laity to see “behind the curtain” and see that even in the eastern Orthodox churches the priest celebrates facing east.)

These days, however, the way that Holy Eucharist is most commonly celebrated in the west is very different. It is called “*versus populum*” which means “facing the people.” In this manner of celebrating the Mass, the priest stands behind the altar and faces the people. This trend is very recent in the history of the Church, having begun only in the mid-to-late 1960’s in a few denominations. It is now *de rigueur* and even (sometimes incorrectly) considered law in most mainline liturgical churches.

Ostensibly it arose because church leaders, under the influence of the so-called “Liturgical Movement” which began in the early 20th century

in parts of Europe, wanted to try to get back to what they believed were the earliest liturgical traditions of the undivided Church. Having the celebrant face the people was one of these. (This same “Liturgical Movement”, by the way, is what was responsible for the near-annihilation of the classic liturgies of western Christendom, especially the Book of Common Prayer and the various forms of the Roman Catholic liturgy.) In their interpretation of ancient documents and church art and architecture the fathers of this movement determined that in the ancient Church the celebration of the Eucharist—the entire service—was always said by the celebrant “*versus populum*”... “facing the people.”

The problem with the movement was that it was arrogant and ill-informed. The former because it assumed that the Church could and should leapfrog over the Middle Ages and early modern era, and pretend that it never happened and that there was no continuity or organic, spirit-lead development in the life and liturgy of the Church. The latter because they really did not know how exactly the Church, in all places, celebrated the Lord’s Supper in the earliest of times. Only when Christianity was legalized in the 4th century do we begin to see complete accounts of how various local churches (such as the Roman Church) celebrated their liturgy on various occasions. And what we see, among other things, is the universal dominance of *ad orientem* celebration of the Holy Eucharist. (See “The Principles of Religious Ceremonial” by the Rt. Rev’d. Walter Frere, C.R., Bishop of Truro, pp. 38-92, published by Mowbray & Co. in 1928.)

Rather than actually getting back to ancient models the so-called “Liturgical Movement” basically created completely new liturgies, which is evident by their extremely selective use of many ancient liturgical sources. Sadly, what many of the fathers of the Liturgical Movement were trying to accomplish was not the renewal of Christianity along ancient lines but rather the deconstruction and reformulation of it along Marxist lines.

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To do this they had to, among other things, destroy the liturgy of the Church, because what the Church *prays* she *believes*. (As the old Latin phrase goes... “Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi.”) And so practices like “westward celebration” (“versus populum”) and replacing “sacral” language (e.g. Ecclesiastical Latin in the Roman Church and Tudor English in the Anglican Church) in the liturgy with the “vernacular”, along with other things, were slowly introduced and later codified into Church practice.

But this raises a question: how does all of this change the theology of the Church? More specifically, how does the position of the celebrant at Mass (the primary focus of this article) accomplish such a change? Does the direction the celebrant faces make any difference so long as the right words are said and everyone involved has the right intentions?

To answer this question let us consider another ritual that has to do with eating: the family dinner. Psychologists everywhere speak of the importance of the “family dinner”... i.e. when a family unit sits down and eats their main meal of the day together. While we might think it does not matter how and where we eat so long as we just eat studies actually show the opposite: namely, that family dinners build relationships and help kids do better in school among other things. In other words, besides the food, there is something very important and significant about the posture and ritual of a family sitting down together at a single table to eat dinner together.

Likewise the physical position and movements of the celebrant and ministers at a church service matter a lot. If the celebrant is standing behind an altar or holy table and facing the congregation the result is a community turned in on itself with the priest as the main attraction. This type of arrangement lends itself more to entertainment and self-indulgence rather than offering and sacrifice, which is the hallmark of true worship. All of this leads theologians to describe “ad populum” liturgies as “horizontal” in nature, by which they mean that the community is so absorbed in its own life and practice that it forgets

about God who is above... or at least he becomes an afterthought. True worship, on the other hand, is directed entirely to God the Father, and offered by the mystical Body of Christ in union with him through the ministerial priesthood of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

People who support this liturgical innovation—lay and ordained—often claim that it makes the celebration of the Eucharist more intimate, and that it brings the sacred actions physically closer to the people. They say that celebrating the sacred mysteries far away from the congregation, at the end of a deep nave and sanctuary, makes the congregation feel as though they are not part of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Therefore, if the altar is moved closer to the congregation, and the priest stands behind it facing them so they can see everything that he does, they will feel like they are more involved in what is going on during the service.

The problem with that idea (besides the way that it typically ruins the aesthetics and architecture of the church) is that save moving the altar into the midst of the people in the nave it does absolutely nothing to bring the congregation physically closer to the celebration of the sacred mysteries. To see this all one needs to do is look at a church that has had a “free standing altar” installed. What will be seen is a deep, gothic nave and sanctuary with an out-of-proportion, tawdry, and unsightly looking “table” plopped in the middle of the quire or crossing, and that is still very far away from the people! Even “churches in the round” (round church buildings with an altar in the middle) do not accomplish what the liturgical revisionists want because the building is almost invariably too big.

In the end one must wonder what if anything these radical liturgical changes accomplished. The terrible state of the Church across denominational lines is the answer. unorthodox changes that were supposed to usher in new life and vitality to the Church have only served to weaken her and water down her witness. When the Church—the “peculiar people” as described in the Bible (1 Pt. 2:9)—rejects her own tradition to try to appeal to the world disaster for her is all that results. Sticking to tradition is always best. ✠

DEAR FATHER FLAPDOODLE: *Godly Advice from the Rev'd Athelston Charles Flapdoodle, D.D.*

Dear Father Flapdoodle,

The other day a friend of a friend on Facebook said that religion has always been opposed to science. Is he right?

Confused in Conowingo

Dear Confused,

I am afraid it is your friend's friend who is confused! It seems he didn't even formulate his criticism well. Does he mean all religions or just a few? And what does he even mean by science? Does he mean, for example, that religious people would not take aspirin if they had a headache but pray to God for healing instead? It is ambiguities like this should make one weary of using Facebook and other forms of social media. But to your question... speaking from a Christian perspective one can say with confidence that the Church has never opposed science but in fact has essentially invented it. One recalls that Charles Darwin is buried in Westminster Abbey and that his funeral service was planned and lead by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. Furthermore the "Big Bang" theory was formulated by a Roman Catholic priest of the Jesuit order. (In fact, until Stephen Hawking came along the theory was rejected by mainstream science because it was thought to be too theistic!) And let us not forget the centuries old English tradition of "parson-naturalists" —Church of England parish clergy who studied natural history as "an extension of his religious work" and whose "philosophy entailed the belief that God, as the Creator of all things, wanted man to understand his Creations and thus to study them through scientific techniques." (Wikipedia) So it seems to me that your friend's friend should do a lot more reading before making such inaccurate and simplistic comments. ACF+

Dear Father Flapdoodle,

I am a Christian who has spent years looking for love. Recently I started dating a man who, although baptized, was not reared in the Church. He is quite unsure about whether or not he believes in God, and is frankly not interested in even exploring the question or attending services with me. The problem is I have fallen in love with him and he with me, and now we want to get married.

Although the religious problems trouble me, he treats me very well. What should I do?

Lovesick in Largo

Dear Lovesick,

As painful as it may be you need to give him an ultimatum: either he converts to the Christian faith and makes Christ the Lord of his life or you are going to break it off. St. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" In the Old Testament God's people —the Israelites— were strictly forbidden from intermarrying with the pagan Canaanites. Why all of this? Not because God is mean and wants us to be unhappy but because he wants us to be truly happy. And a person can only find true happiness when he lives his life in communion and fellowship with God. An unbeliever will invariably draw our hearts away from the true God because, when we think about, they are actually worshipping a different god. While God sometimes works miracles and leads unbelievers to faith in Christ through the believing spouse it is best not to tempt fate. It is always best to obey God first. Jesus says, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness." (Matt. 6:33) Remember also that in marriage it helps to have as much in common as possible, and to share the same worldview. Marriage is hard enough as it, without adding on religious differences that could boil over into open hostility. While those who find themselves already married to unbelievers or lapsed Christians are commanded by St. Paul to stay married to them (he's writing to believers in the midst of a very pagan world), those like yourself who have not yet made that final commitment are urged to find a Christian with whom to share your life and start a family. God bless you as you seek to remain faithful to him! ACF+

Ed. Note: Fr. Flapdoodle is a longtime friend and associate of Fr. Anderson, as well as the parish secretary. He will be answering questions from the mailbag from time to time in The Centurion. ☩