

Bishop Conley of Lincoln to offer the Mass ad Orientem

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS ON NOVEMBER 19, 2014 IP5 BLOG



Bishop James D. Conley has announced that many of the faithful in the Diocese of Lincoln will see something significantly different when they go to Mass this Advent. From the

bishop's [column](http://www.lincolndiocese.org/oped/bishop-s-column/3004-looking-to-the-east) (<http://www.lincolndiocese.org/oped/bishop-s-column/3004-looking-to-the-east>) in this week's Southern Nebraska Register:

“In the season of Advent, as we recall Christ’s Incarnation at Christmas, we are reminded to be prepared for Christ’s coming. In the Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent this year, Nov. 30, Christ tells us his disciples “to be on the watch.”

“We remember that Christ is coming whenever we celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. In the Holy Mass we are made present to the sacrifice at Calvary, and to the joy of Christ’s glory in heaven. But we also remember that Christ will return, and we remember to watch, to be vigilant, to wait for him, and to be prepared.

“The Mass is rich with symbolism. The vestments of the priest remind us of the dignity of Christ the King. We strike our breasts, and bow our heads, and bend our knees to remember our sinfulness, God’s mercy, and his glory. In the Mass, the ways we stand, and sit, and kneel, remind us of God’s eternal plan for us.

“Since ancient times, Christians have faced the east during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass to remember to keep watch for Christ. Together, the priest and the people faced the east together, waiting and watching for Christ. Even in Churches that did not face the east, the priest and people stood together in the Mass, gazing at Christ on the crucifix, on the altar, and in the tabernacle, to recall the importance of watching for his return. The symbolism of the priest and people facing ad orientem—to the east—is an ancient reminder of the coming of Christ.”

“But the symbolism of facing together, and awaiting Christ, is rich, time-honored and important. **Especially during Advent, as we await the coming of the Lord, facing the east together—even symbolically facing Christ together at the altar and on the crucifix—is a powerful witness to Christ’s imminent return.** Today, at a time when it is easy to forget that Christ is coming—and easy to be complacent in our spiritual lives and in the work of evangelization—we need reminders that Christ will come.

“**During the Sundays of Advent, the priests in the Cathedral of the Risen Christ will celebrate the Mass ad orientem. With the People of God, the priest will stand facing the altar, and facing the crucifix. When I celebrate midnight Mass on Christmas, I will celebrate ad orientem as well. This may take place in other parishes across the Diocese of Lincoln as well.**“

Make no mistake about it, this is big news. In many ways the near total disappearance of mass offered facing the altar has been the liturgical story of the past fifty years. While not required by the Second Vatican Council, versus populum has become the de facto norm in the Ordinary Form. For the faithful more often than not these days, it is only in the Extraordinary Form that the priest offers the mass ad orientem.

In his seminal work **The Spirit of the Liturgy**, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger discussed the ramifications of the post-conciliar change in liturgical orientation:

“The turning of the priest towards the people has turned the community into a self-enclosed circle. In its outward form, it no longer opens out on what lies ahead and above, but is closed in on itself. . . For just as the congregation in the synagogue looked together toward Jerusalem, so in the Christian liturgy the congregation looked together “towards the Lord.” As one of the Fathers of Vatican II’s Constitution on the Liturgy, J. A. Jungmann, put it, it was much more a question of priest and people facing in the same direction, knowing that together they were in a procession towards the Lord. They did not close themselves into a circle, they did not gaze at one another, but as the pilgrim People of God they set off for the Oriens, for the Christ who comes to meet us.”

Bishop Conley expresses a similar view in his column when he explains:

“In the ad orientem posture at Mass, the priest will not be facing away from the people. He will be with them—among them, and leading them—facing Christ, and waiting for His return.”

Sincerely pray for more bishops to step forward and also offer such a courageous example to the priests and laity of their dioceses. May they recognize that by offering the mass ad orientem during Advent, Bishop Conley will be catechizing the faithful while restoring authenticity and continuity to the liturgy.