

# Vatican liturgy chief urges priests to celebrate Mass facing east

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*Cardinal Robert Sarah made the comments in an exclusive interview with Famille Chrétienne*

The Vatican's liturgy chief has called on priests to celebrate Mass facing east.

In an interview [<http://www.famillechretienne.fr/vie-chretienne/liturgie/cardinal-sarah-comment-remettre-dieu-au-caeur-de-la-liturgie-194987#.V0bFpURrE2U.twitter>] with the French Catholic magazine Famille Chrétienne, Cardinal Robert Sarah said that the Second Vatican Council did not require priests to celebrate Mass facing the people.

This way of celebrating Mass, he said, was “a possibility, but not an obligation”.



*Cardinal Robert Sarah celebrates Mass in Haiti in 2010 (CNS)*

Readers and listeners should face each other during the Liturgy of the Word, he said.

“But as soon as we reach the moment when one addresses God – from the Offertory onwards – it is essential that the priest and faithful look together towards the east. This corresponds exactly to what the Council Fathers wanted.”

Cardinal Sarah, prefect of the

Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, rejected the argument that priests celebrating Mass facing east are turning their backs on the faithful “or against them”.

Rather, he said, all are “turned in the same direction: towards the Lord who comes”.

“It is legitimate and complies with the letter and spirit of the Council,” he said. “As prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, I wish to recall that the celebration **versus orientem** [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ad\\_orientem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ad_orientem)] is authorised by the rubrics, which specify the times when the celebrant must turn to the people. It is therefore not necessary to have special permission to celebrate facing the Lord.”

Cardinal Sarah's remarks echo an **article** [[http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3947/silent\\_action\\_of\\_the\\_heart.aspx](http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3947/silent_action_of_the_heart.aspx)] he wrote a year ago for L'Osservatore Romano, in which he said it was “altogether appropriate, during the penitential rite, the singing of the Gloria, the orations and the Eucharistic prayer, that everyone, priest and faithful, turn together toward the East, so as to express their intention to participate in the work of worship and redemption accomplished by Christ.”

The cardinal added in the article that Mass facing east could be “implemented in cathedrals, where the liturgical life must be exemplary”.