

Vatican rejects Cardinal Sarah's ad orientem appeal

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Pope Francis met Cardinal Sarah to indicate that no liturgical directives will begin in Advent, according to Vatican spokesman

Pope Francis has made it clear that no new liturgical directives will be introduced for Advent, according to the Vatican spokesman.

Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, urged priests and bishops at the Sacra Liturgia conference in London on July 5 to start celebrating Masses ad orientem, or facing away from the congregation, beginning on the first Sunday of Advent this year.

However, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, issued a statement on July 11 indicating the Pope Francis met with Cardinal Sarah on July 9 to indicate no liturgical directives will begin in Advent.

"Cardinal Sarah is always rightly concerned with the dignity of the celebration of Mass, that it might adequately express an attachment of respect and adoration for the eucharistic mystery," Fr Lombardi's statement said.

"Some of his phrasing has been badly interpreted, as if he had announced new, different indications from those now given in liturgical norms and the words of the popes on celebration toward the people and the ordinary rite of the Mass," the spokesman added.

He recalled that the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, which "remains fully in force," indicated that the altar should be built away from the wall so "that Mass can be celebrated at it facing the people, which is desirable wherever possible."

The statement also reminded people that when Pope Francis visited the offices of the congregation for divine worship, "he expressly recalled that the 'ordinary' form of the celebration of Mass is that foreseen by the missal promulgated by Paul VI," and that the extraordinary form permitted by Benedict XVI "should not take the place of that 'ordinary' form."

Fr Lombardi also said it would be better "to avoid the use of the expression 'reform of the reform,' referring

to the liturgy, given that it's sometimes the sources of misunderstandings."

At the conference in London, Cardinal Sarah had asked that "wherever possible, with prudence and with the necessary catechesis, certainly, but also with a pastor's confidence that this is something good for the

church," priests face east when celebrating the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Several liturgical experts said Cardinal Sarah does not have the authority to impose a change but is simply encouraging a practice that liturgical law already permits.

"I think he's just encouraging as anyone can encourage, but because of his position, his encouragement carries more weight. He's not changing the

legislation at all; he's just giving his opinion that he thinks this would help people to pray better," Fr Andrew Menke, associate director of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' divine worship office, told Catholic News Service on July 6.

Fr Menke also said that as new editions of the Roman Missal are released, liturgical law is bound to shift, but he doubts anything would happen regarding the direction the priest faces, except perhaps more encouragement of "ad orientem" Masses in future missal editions.

Others agreed, saying neither bishops nor Cardinal Sarah have the right to force priests to celebrate Mass "facing East" until there is an official change to the missal, the official liturgical law.

Meanwhile in Britain, [Cardinal Vincent Nichols has written to priests in his Westminster diocese](#) discouraging them from celebrating Mass facing east.

He issued the message to clergy days after Cardinal Sarah spoke at the at the Sacra Liturgia conference.

