

Do *This* In Memory Of Me

In this installment of our considerations of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* we will look at the orientation of the priest, and the postures and gestures that are to be observed by the faithful in the celebration of the Mass.

In 2016, Cardinal Sarah, the Prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, reminded the Church that the Mass need not always be offered facing the people. In fact, he suggested that there were times and seasons in the liturgical life of the Church when saying the Mass facing east (*ad orientem*) would be more appropriate, during Advent for example.

Before going into the *General Instruction* itself, it should suffice to say that Masses offered facing the people did not begin after the Second Vatican Council. Mass facing the people had always been permitted, just as today Mass facing the east is always permitted, without imposing any obligation to prefer one over the other. However, given the historical norm of offering Mass facing the east, the *General Instruction* and the *Roman Missal* itself both presume that this is how the priest is offering the Mass. At times what is needed is a greater liberality in welcoming the use of the legitimate options that the Church makes available within the liturgy. Perhaps another example might be how the faithful receive Holy Communion. The Church allows Holy Communion to be received either standing, which is the norm, or kneeling, which is the custom; in the hand, which is the norm, or on the tongue, which is the custom; both however are left to the judgement of the one receiving the Eucharist without impose an obligation to prefer one over the other.

In paragraph two of the *General Instruction* the Church says that, *the priest enacts the anamnesis, while turned towards God likewise in the name of all the people, he renders thanks and offers the living and holy sacrifice, that is, the Church's oblation and the sacrificial Victim by whose death God himself willed to reconcile us to himself. (Emphasis added.)*

The rubrics¹ found in the *Roman Missal* also presume that the priest is offering Mass *ad orientem* in that there are six² specific instances when the priest is instructed to turn and face the people when saying or doing something. Those instances are:

- The introductory rites of the Mass. *The Lord be with you, etc...*(GIRM 124).
- The invitation to pray following the offertory prayers. *Pray brothers and sisters, etc...*(GIRM 146).
- The greeting of peace. *The peace of the Lord be with you always.* (GIRM 154).
- The showing of the Sacred Host with the words, *Behold the Lamb of God, etc...*(GIRM 157).
- The invitation to pray before the post communion prayer. *Let us pray.* (GIRM).
- The final blessing. (Ordo Missae 141).³

Before looking at the postures and gesture of the faithful it might be useful to pause for one clarification regarding how the faithful are to receive Holy Communion, first mentioned above.

In paragraph number 160 of the *General Instruction* the norm is established by which the people are to receive Holy Communion standing with the one caveat that the long standing custom of receiving Holy Communion while kneeling be preserved. This custom was reiterated by the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in the instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, which grants the faithful the option

¹ The word "rubric" means "red" and refers to the red letter writing in the *Roman Missal* that instructs the priest regarding what to say and do and when to say and do it.

² In the traditional form of the Mass the priest turned to face the people on seven separate occasions.

³ The "Ordo Missae" refers to the rubrics spoken of above.

of kneeling if that is what they chose to do (*RS no. 91*). For this reason, and at the requests of some of the parish faithful, a kneeler will be provided for those who choose to receive Holy Communion while kneeling and so that they may do so with greater ease.

Continuing on with the instructions with regards to the postures and gestures of the people during the Mass we have to turn our attention to paragraph 43 of the *General Instruction* which will be cited in full with some emphasis. The reason why the instructions for the faithful are more or less all gathered in one paragraph rather than spread throughout the *Roman Missal* itself is that the instruction for the Mass and the rubrics are more concerned about the movements of the priest and the ministers, and so:

*The faithful should stand from the beginning of the Entrance Chant, or while the Priest approaches the altar, until the end of the Collect; for the Alleluia Chant before the Gospel; while the Gospel itself is proclaimed; during the Profession of Faith and the Universal Prayer; and from the invitation, Orate, fratres (Pray, brethren), before the Prayer over the Offerings until the end of Mass, except at the places indicated here below. The faithful should sit, on the other hand, during the readings before the Gospel and the Responsorial Psalm and for the Homily and during the Preparation of the Gifts at the Offertory; and, if appropriate, they may sit or kneel during the period of sacred silence after Communion. In the dioceses of the United States of America, they should kneel beginning after the singing or recitation of the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) until after the Amen of the Eucharistic Prayer, except when prevented on occasion by ill health, or for reasons of lack of space, of the large number of people present, or for another reasonable cause. However, those who do not kneel ought to make a profound bow when the Priest genuflects after the Consecration. The faithful kneel after the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) unless the Diocesan Bishop determines otherwise. **For the sake of uniformity in gestures and bodily postures during one and the same celebration, the faithful should follow the instructions which the Deacon, a lay minister, or the Priest gives, according to what is laid down in the Missal.***

By way of conclusion paragraphs number 95-97 of the *General Instruction* will also be cited with some emphasis regarding the function of the people during the celebration of the Mass:

*In the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people of God's own possession and a royal Priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the unblemished sacrificial Victim not only by means of the hands of the Priest but also together with him and so that they may learn to offer their very selves. They should, moreover, take care to show this by their deep religious sense and their charity toward brothers and sisters who participate with them in the same celebration. **They are consequently to avoid any appearance of singularity or division, keeping in mind that they have only one Father in heaven and that hence are all brothers or sisters one to the other.** Moreover, they are to form one body, whether in hearing the Word of God, or in taking part in the prayers and in the singing, or above all by the common offering of the Sacrifice and by participating together at the Lord's table. **This unity is beautifully apparent from the gestures and bodily postures observed together by the faithful.** The faithful, moreover, should not refuse to serve the People of God in gladness whenever they are asked to perform some particular service or function in the celebration.*

Next week we will look at the roles of various ministers and their place in the liturgy.