

Altars with Tabernacles

THERE IS confusion, perhaps even some contradiction, in the texts of the altar Missal:

- One sentence alone permits and prefers, but does not command, the priest to face the people over the altar.
- Yet texts on the priest at the altar direct him when to turn to face the people, which suggests he is not facing them over the altar, but on their side of it.

FACING THE PEOPLE for the Liturgy of the Eucharist is in GIRM just once

THE GIRM, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, is printed in the front of the Missal as an introduction. It explains how Mass is to be celebrated. It is usually omitted from the people's Missals.

The new GIRM (2002) has been available in English as a separate book of 142 pp since 2007.

But for one sentence in it, the entire Missal would have no mention of 'facing the people' for the Liturgy of the Eucharist:

The altar should be built apart from the wall, in such a way that it is possible to walk around it easily and that Mass can be celebrated at it **FACING THE PEOPLE**, which is desirable wherever possible.... *Altare extruatur a pariete seiunctum, ut facile circumiri et in eo celebratio versus populum peragi possi sit...*

GIRM 299 [262]

Eight documents are analyzed: Missals of 1975 and 2002, their GIRMs & Rubrics, in Latin & English. In the quotes from GIRM & Rubrics of the 2002 Missal, **SMALL BOLD CAPITALS** are for emphasis. Other texts of its English edition are not likely before 2010, with translations by the Vox Clara Committee of English-language bishops world-wide. Cardinal Pell of Sydney is President; Archbishop Coleridge of Canberra & Goulburn is a major translator.

Smaller numbers in square brackets [-] refer to the 1975 current 2nd edition of the altar Missal, so readers can check that its GIRM & Rubrics say much the same as most of the quotes herein.

FACING THE PEOPLE for the Liturgy of the Eucharist is not in Missal Rubrics at all. 1975/2002

RUBRICS are rules in red between the prayers in black in the Order of the Mass (the Ordinary, not the Propers) in the middle of the Missal. The actions prescribed in the rubrics are repeated in the GIRM.

The people's Missals omit most rubrics, except for the *Daily Roman Missal* from the Philippines, which has them in Latin and ICEL English (which do not always correspond).

Some rubrics for the priest at the altar, and their matching texts in the GIRM, seem to make sense only if **facing the altar** and **facing the people** are **OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS**. For instance...

TWO RUBRICS BEFORE COMMUNION

Rubric 132 [133]: The Priest genuflects, takes the Host and, holding it slightly raised above the paten or chalice, while **FACING THE PEOPLE**, says aloud, 'Behold, the Lamb of God...'. *Sacerdos genuflectit, accipit hostiam, eamque aliquantulum elevatam super patenam vel super calicem tenens, versus ad populum, clara voce dicit, 'Ecce Agnus Dei...'* cf. GIRM 157 [115].

Rubric 133 [134]: The Priest, **FACING THE ALTAR**, says quietly: 'May the Body of Christ...'. *Et sacerdos, versus ad altare, secreto dicit: 'Corpus Christi...'* cf. GIRM 158 [116].

OTHER RELEVANT RUBRICS IN THE MASS

Here are *all* the other rubrics on the priest turning to face the people to greet them, or their context. These directives are redundant for a priest at the altar if he were facing the people over it.

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES (not at the altar)

Rubric 1 [2]: "When the Entrance Chant is concluded, the Priest and the faithful, standing, sign themselves with the Sign of the Cross, while the Priest, **FACING THE PEOPLE**, says: 'In the name of the Father...'. *Cantu ad introitum absolute, sacerdos et fideles, stantes, signant se signo crucis, dum sacerdos, ad populum conversus, dicit: 'In nomine Patris...'* cf. GIRM 124 [86].

WASHING OF HANDS and 'PRAY, BRETHREN'

Rubric 28 [24]: Then the Priest, standing **AT THE SIDE OF THE ALTAR**, washes his hands, saying quietly... *Deinde sacerdos, stans ad latus altaris, lavat manus, dicens secreto...* cf. GIRM 145 [106].

Rubric 29 [25]: Standing in the middle of the altar, **FACING THE PEOPLE**, extending and then joining his hands, he says: 'Pray, brethren...'. *Stans postea in media altaris, versus ad populum, extendens et iungens manus, dicit, 'Orate, fratres...'* cf. GIRM 146 [107].

DIALOGUE BEFORE THE PREFACE

Rubric 31 [27]: DOES NOT HAVE A TURNING TO THE PEOPLE for the Priest's greeting from the altar. This contrasts with *all the other references* on turning to greet the people from the altar, in rubrics 29, 127, 132 and 139. Therefore this time he does not turn round.

SIGN OF PEACE (the Latin simply calls it *PAX*, "Peace")

Rubric 127 [128]: The Priest, **TURNED TOWARDS THE PEOPLE**, extending and then joining his hands, adds: "The peace of the Lord...". *Sacerdos, ad populum conversus, extendens et iungens manus, subdit: 'Pax Domini...'* cf. GIRM 154 [112]. (The present *English* altar missal of 1975 omits 'turned toward the people'.)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION (at chair or altar)

Rubric 139: Then, standing at the altar or at the chair and **FACING THE PEOPLE**, with hands joined, the Priest says: 'Let us pray.' *Deinde, stans ad altare vel ad sedem, sacerdos, versus ad populum, iunctis manibus, dicit: 'Oremus.'* cf. GIRM 165 [122] (the emphasized words are not in old Rubric 140).

THE CONCLUDING RITES (at chair or altar)

Rubric 141 [142]: Then the dismissal takes place. The Priest, **FACING THE PEOPLE** and extending his hands, says... *Deinde fit dimissio. Sacerdos, versus ad populum, extendens manus, dicit...* (However GIRM 167 [124] omits it.)

FIRST CONCLUSION

The Missal's directions on 'Mass facing the people' are inconsistent. Clearly, it is permitted, yet also clearly, the priest at the altar is to meant to ignore 'turning to the people' when he is already doing so.

Before turning over, see *Gospel Kneeling to Jesus* in *Handouts* n. 50p. 2, on the coming abolition of genuflections by the priest and ministers to a tabernacle on the main sanctuary during Mass, as prescribed by GIRM (2002/2007) 274. See also *Handouts* n. 47, *Kneel, Genuflect, Bow*.

TABERNACLES ON ALTARS

VC II: Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 1963

There is **nothing in the documents of VCII**, nor was there any discussion at it (1962-1965), about:

- The priest facing the people over the altar;
- moving the tabernacle off the altar.

However, new ideas were introduced purporting to implement the 2nd session's SC, even before the 3rd session, and went unquestioned at the 3rd and 4th:

The main altar should preferably be freestanding, to permit walking around it and celebration facing the people... It is lawful to celebrate Mass facing the people even on an altar where there is a small but becoming tabernacle.

Inter (Ecumenici (1964: the *First Instruction*) 91, 95

EM innovations in 1967 prior to Novus Ordo

It is... *recommended*... **the tabernacle be placed in a chapel** distinct from the main body of the church, above all... where marriages and funerals take place frequently

EM - Eucharisticum Mysterium (1967) 53

The Blessed Sacrament should be reserved... in the middle of the main altar... [!] or on a side altar... "Mass may be celebrated facing the people even if on the altar there is a small but adequate tabernacle."

ibid. 54 (it quotes *Inter (Ecumenici* 95)

In the celebration of Mass **the principal ways in which Christ is present** to his Church are *successively revealed*. First... Christ is present among the faithful gathered in his name; **then** in his Word, as the Scriptures are read and explained; **also** in the person of the minister; **finally** and in a unique way under the Eucharistic Species. *Consequently, by reason of the sign*, it is more in keeping with the nature of the sacred celebration that the Eucharistic presence of Christ, which is the fruit of the consecration and **should be seen as such**, and, as far as possible, should not be on the altar from the very beginning of Mass through the reservation of the Sacred Species in the tabernacle.

ibid. 55 (citing 9 which lists Christ's presence in the same order)

Innovations "in the name of VCII"

Not all these changes flowed from VCII's SC (1963). True, EM 55 *cited* SC 7 indirectly in EM 9, but did not quote it: indeed, **their contents are in contrast**:

...Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass not only the person of his minister, "the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross" [Trent], but especially in the eucharistic species. By his power he is present in the sacraments so that when anybody baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. Lastly, he is present when the Church prays or sings... [Mat 18:20].

VCII (1963) SC 7

In 1963, there was no chronology.

Yet 1967's EM derived novel conclusions by:

- re-arranging the hierarchical order chronologically;
- omitting Christ's presence in power in baptism etc;
- wrongly getting from chronology a conflict between Christ's abiding tabernacle Presence and His renewed Sacrificial Presence on the same altar.

EM's "by reason of the sign" has ignored the *sign of the tabernacle* — the tabernacle of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar of Sacrifice.

Innovations of 1970 with the Novus Ordo:

It is highly recommended (*illud valde commendandum est*) that the holy eucharist be reserved **in a chapel** suitable for private adoration and prayer. If this is impossible because of the structure of the church or local custom, it should be kept on an altar or other place in the church that is prominent and properly decorated...

GIRM (1970/75) 276

This contrasts with a recent new preference:

It is more in keeping with the meaning of the sign (*ratione signi magis congruit...*) that the tabernacle in which the Most Holy Eucharist is reserved not be on an altar on which Mass is celebrated. Consequently...

- a. Either **in the sanctuary**, apart from the altar... not excluding **on an old altar** no longer used for celebration.
- b. Or, likewise, in some chapel... readily visible to the Christian faithful.

GIRM (2002/2007) 315, and quoting EM 55 (above)

Pope Pius XII's Prophetic Teaching (1956)

The altar is more important than the tabernacle, because on it is offered the Lord's sacrifice. In the tabernacle, on the other hand, He is present as long as the consecrated species last, yet is not making a permanent sacrificial offering. ... **An awareness of their unity is more important than a realization of their difference**. It is one and the same Lord Who is immolated on the altar and honoured in the tabernacle, and Who pours out His blessings from the tabernacle. ... **A person who is thoroughly convinced of this would avoid many difficulties**. He would be wary of exaggerating the significance of one to the detriment of the other. There is... a tendency to... a lessening of esteem for the presence and action of Christ in the tabernacle. The sacrifice of the altar is held sufficient, and the importance of Him Who accomplishes it is reduced. Yet the person of our Lord must hold the central place in worship, for it is His person that unifies the relations of the altar and the tabernacle and gives them their meaning... to separate tabernacle from altar is **to separate two things which by their origin and nature remain united**.

Pius XII: International Congress on Pastoral Liturgy, Assisi, 1956

Current precedents for tabernacles on altars:

Contradicting the new ideas from 1964, there is daily Mass on altars not facing the people, and with tabernacles with the Blessed Sacrament reserved, in the Pope's private chapel, and in the big public chapels of the Blessed Sacrament in Rome's major basilicas of St Peter and St John Lateran.

SECOND CONCLUSION

The new rites seem contradictory, in aiming to:

- a) **preserve** faith and piety in the Real Presence; but
- b) **reduce** the signs of faith and piety sustaining it. **HAS tampering with TABERNACLES and genuflections weakened faith and piety in the Real Presence to the point where some folk no longer really believe?**

Finally, there must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely requires them...

VC II SC 23.

Even the supreme authority in the Church may not change the liturgy arbitrarily...

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1125

Many hope for THE REFORM OF THE REFORM