

From the Pastor's Desk

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

I want to share with you something that has been on my mind for a little while now. We are blessed here at St. Pat's to be able to celebrate Mass in a church that will be 127 years old on October 29. And we are further blessed to have three beautiful altars that are original to the church – the high altar with the tabernacle, and the two altars dedicated to Mary and Joseph. These are in addition to the free-standing altar that we use regularly. My hope would be to start using the other three altars on occasion. But to do this would require something different.

To celebrate Mass on the other three altars would require me to celebrate Mass “ad orientem” or “to the east.” This would purely be in the liturgical sense here because the church actually faces south. Some have referred to this as a Mass celebrated with the priest's back to the people, but this is not quite what is happening here. While it is true that the priest is facing the altar, this is not done just to turn away from everyone. Rather, the priest does this so that we are all praying in the same direction to the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Really, most of the Mass is a prayer directed to the Heavenly Father as the priest is praying “in persona Christi,” or “in the person of Christ.”

During Mass, the congregation faces the altar, which is the focal point of the liturgy, for that is where Heaven and earth come together once more as the sacrifice of Jesus' Body and Blood is re-presented for us. The practice of the Church since the close of Vatican II has been to celebrate Mass on a free-standing while facing the people, or “versus populum.” Before then, the practice was that both priest and people would pray in the same direction together. Both forms of the Mass are permitted by the Church, though “ad orientem” is not the norm anymore.

My thought is to celebrate Mass in this fashion for special occasions. This would be for celebrations like First Saturdays on Mary's altar, special feasts of St. Joseph on Joseph's altar, and other special Masses, maybe for midnight Christmas Mass or the Feast of St. Patrick. This is not something that I am considering for a regular Sunday Mass, rather it would only be for special occasions. The Mass will continue to be celebrated in English. My thought is to celebrate this for the first time on the anniversary of the dedication of our church, which was on October 29, 1899. This is a solemnity for our parish and a great celebration. Additionally, the first Mass ever celebrated in this church would have been on that very same high altar.

I recognize that this might be seen as Father being annoyed with the people and not wanting to look at them. Please be assured that this is not the case. I do really love being here in Arcola with all of you! I want to avoid upsetting anyone with my liturgical preferences, while also being open to beautiful traditional practices of a 2,000-year-old Church. My hope is to continue praying the Mass with you and for you, but occasionally in a way in which all of us are praying in the same direction. If celebrating an “ad orientem” Mass is not the preference of the parish at this time, then I won't offer it. Or if this is something that we want to try for a little while, and we find that this is not going well, then we can stop doing this. Just because we start it doesn't mean that we are locked into it forever.

(over)

In summary, I desire to offer something different but beautiful for our parish in offering some Masses celebrated "ad orientem." I am asking for your thoughts on this. I know I haven't been here long, but I hope that everyone feels comfortable enough with me at this point to be able to approach me and offer honest and charitable feedback. Offering Mass in this fashion is not something that I need to do, but I think it is an opportunity for something beautiful here. And I as I mentioned, this would be reserved for special occasions, as listed above. Please let me know what your thoughts are on this within the next two weeks. And please know of my prayers for all of you daily. May the Lord Jesus continue to bless and strengthen our St. Patrick parish family!

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Rev. Bobby Krisch".

Fr. Bobby Krisch

October 7, 2026