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Cross, Altar and the Right Way of Praying

January 1, 2012 By [Fr. Stefan Heid](#)

Recalling the rituals and rubrics of the past which retain their meaning today.

In the Vatican, and in the pontifical basilicas of Rome (formerly called “patriarchal basilicas”), a ruling has recently been made that a standing cross should be placed at the center of high or freestanding altars. No specification is given as to the kind and size of the cross. As a rule, the implementation of this request has been appropriate: a high-standing cross with corpus has been set in place facing the priest celebrant, such that he is able to look upon the crucified Jesus. Such a request, which articulates what should actually be a matter of course, may come as a surprise. But in Rome, for many years prior to this time, the bad habit had developed of pushing the cross to the corner of the altar, so that it would not “disturb,” facilitating a “television friendly” liturgy, especially for papal Masses.

The cross is the focal point of salvation and of liturgical action. It should, of course, harmonize with the altar in style and proportion, but it should certainly not be low standing. The cross is supposed to disturb! The priest is not supposed to “overlook” it! However, the objection is sometimes made that a barrier is created by the cross between clergy and people, something on the line of an *iconostasis* (a wall of icons in Eastern rite churches, separating the nave from the sanctuary). But this is a specious argument as even the enormous altar cross in the Basilica of St. Peter does not really block the view. There are very few churches, after all, where the people face the altar straight on; more commonly, they face the altar from a lateral perspective, looking past the cross to the priest. Moreover, the higher the cross is placed, the less likely it will obstruct the people’s view. It thus becomes for all a spiritual “attention-getter” (if it is aesthetically high-standing). Finally, it is further objected that an altar cross creates a doubling of crucifixes, in the case that a cross already hangs above or behind the altar. However, the cross *on* the altar is for the priest, facing him with its corpus, while the faithful look at their cross *above* the altar.

There will no doubt be some clashes with liturgical committees, when pastors, choosing to follow Roman custom, begin taking their altar crosses out of the closet. In order to forestall precipitous reactions in these debates, we would like to establish the larger context in which the discussion belongs. There are a number of liturgical practices that have disappeared from use over centuries. Without a reflective look at these rituals, however, it could easily happen that even the loveliest of liturgical directives would shrivel into meaningless formalism.

The sacrificial action of the Eucharist takes place on the altar, within a continuous current of prayer: from the prayer over the gifts, through the Eucharistic Prayer, to the Our Father. In this respect, the Eucharistic action is markedly different from the liturgy of the Word that precedes it. The ambo is, strictly speaking, not a place of prayer; the Opening Prayer is better placed at the celebrant’s chair. In the *usus antiquior*, the priest is always standing at the altar, and almost always praying! The silent prayers are neither private prayers nor mere time-fillers (i.e., *horror vacui*), but rather to make the altar a place of unceasing prayer.

Once this point has been acknowledged, the implication is that the priest at the altar takes on a different attitude, or mindset, than he has anywhere else. Here he stands, first and foremost, as one who prays. Christianity recognizes this distinctive prayer posture where the priest raises his hands, as well as his eyes. The raising of hands and eyes belongs, inseparably, to the gesture of early

Christian prayer, just as Jesus himself practiced in the Jewish tradition. Standing in prayer is also part of this tradition, seen as a fundamental posture for one in prayer; on one's knees praying, likewise, uses elevated hands and eyes, all dating back to early Christianity. Since the Middle Ages, this prayer posture, with hands and eyes raised, has faded somewhat from practice. Now, it is only the priest raising his hands (and eyes for only a few short moments) because he is reading prayers. He does look up, for instance, in the Roman canon at the time of the consecration while speaking the words: "*et elevatis oculis in coelum*". Therefore, Jesus inaugurates the Eucharist "with eyes raised to heaven."

Even in the *ordo novus*, the rubric at this point reads: "He (the priest) raises his eyes." But where exactly is the priest supposed to be looking, at the church ceiling? So when the priest in reciting a prayer is required to look upward, rather than simply staring into space, the obvious focal point is a high-standing cross on the main altar.



Of course, the practice of having a cross on the altar facing the priest is not only needed for a few isolated moments. It has a more general purpose. When the priest stands at the altar in unceasing prayer to God, he will be gazing at God's Son, through whom his every petition, his every word of praise, is, in fact, offered.

Since God is creator, the world is not chaotic, but a universe divinely fashioned and providentially ordered. There is an "above" and a "below," or in scriptural terms, upon the heavens his throne is set, earth is his footstool. Already, the early Church Fathers observed that Christians stand erect to pray: as free creatures of God, who hold their heads high, and look up with their eyes to the One who looks down on them from his heavenly throne. To pray is to converse with God. It would be impolite not to be looking at someone with whom we are conversing. The act of looking up when we pray is, therefore, an expression of the whole creation theology of the Old and New Testaments.

Sinful man attempts to hide from God, like Adam and Eve hid in the bushes. Redeemed man, on the other hand, does not need to hang his head in shame; happy and free, he may look God in the face and "dare" to say: "Our Father, who art in heaven." He may dare to do this because Jesus Christ is truly Son by nature, and he alone can pray "Father;" while we, through grace, enjoy the same relationship, being so invited into this act of filial boldness. We are *only* creatures, but the baptized are *privileged* creatures, because, whether man or woman, we are in Christ as beloved sons and daughters of the same heavenly Father.

This was precisely what the early Church wished to bring to expression in the prayer posture it adopted. In prayer, when we speak with God, we embrace our filial identity. But since in the physical space of the church, one's view to the heavenly throne of God was blocked by walls, the effort was made to clear a virtual path of vision to heaven. The apse was often painted, or studded,

with mosaics, with a section of the painting portraying the starry sky. This broke open the church's ceiling to heaven.

The priests and the faithful could look up to the apse when they prayed, seeing into heaven, so to speak. The gaze of the faithful was not focused on the altar and the celebrant, but rather overhead. The church building itself always had to be "oriented" to the east at this graphically depicted heavenly art. The actual geographical orientation toward the east was of secondary importance.

Now, it was clear from the beginning that Christian prayer was not simply directed to God alone, but through Jesus Christ to the heavenly Father. This is precisely where the cross comes into play as a focal point. Thus, in the early church, not only heaven, but the cross, as well, was depicted in the apse, or at least placed at a high location in the apse. Everyone was supposed to be looking at the cross when they prayed. The best example of this arrangement is in the apse of the church of *Sant'Apollinare* in Classe near Ravenna, Italy, which dates back to the sixth century.

The Church's practice of placing an elevated cross on the altar—which up to a few decades ago was taken to be a matter of course—was well-grounded, both liturgically and theologically. Even after the Second Vatican Council, there was no good reason why crucifixes should be placed like props only on the rarely used side altars. On the contrary, the altar is the place of prayer: the cross belongs there, and, indeed, even more so, on the main altar. It is the place of raising one's hands, mind and eyes to "look upon the one whom they have pierced." Here, heaven opened up at the moment when darkness covered the earth: the Sun of Righteousness on the cross was raised up at the center of the earth, making our darkness light.

In the myriad publications about the posture of prayer, one rarely finds so much as a reference to the raising of the hands. Authors always assume, as their starting point, the prayer posture of "normal" believers, who fold their hands in prayer. After all, hand folding dates back many hundred years. Nevertheless, the point is regularly concealed that the "real" prayer posture (still today) is what the priest does at Mass. Whenever the priest says, "Let us pray," he lifts up his hands as he begins praying. In the early and medieval Church, as the priest announced, "Let us pray," the congregation would stand up, raising their hands. In modern times, however, the prayer postures of priest and faithful have parted ways. The faithful kneel or stand when they pray, and fold their hands. The early Christian prayer posture, the raising of hands and eyes to heaven, has been so thoroughly forgotten, that it is no longer felt to be a gesture of prayer at all; rather it is taken to be some specifically priestly ritual of obscure origin.

Wide divergence and inconsistency of practice do not make it easy for the faithful to understand what the raising of the priest's hands is supposed to mean, and what it has to do with prayer, especially since the congregation does not use such a posture. Priests themselves appear to have no idea why they do what they do, for each one does it in a different way. At the moment, there is no common practice with regard to prayer posture. It seems to me that there is something missing here. After all, the Christian faith, owing to the Incarnation, has a much closer, more conscious relationship to the body than do other religions. Prayer is not mere interiority, but must incarnate itself in particular prayer postures.

The most important thing with regard to prayer posture was already mentioned in connection with the raising of the eyes. The early Christians explicitly stressed the point that man is not like the other animals walking on four paws; rather, man stands erect, and in a certain sense, approaches heaven through his bodily disposition. Man can acknowledge God, and speak to him. This is why he stands erect, raises his hands and eyes to heaven. Everyone who prays should adopt this posture, not only the priest.

Christians took over the common customary prayer posture of late antiquity. They even emphasized this very continuity. For them, too, God was in heaven. Of course, for them there was

only one God, who created heaven and earth. But there was an unqualified acceptance by Christians for using this Jewish and pagan prayer posture. The raising of hands and eyes was important to them because God had his throne in heaven.

More importantly, there is another practice taken from antiquity which they adopted: the cleansing of the hands. The hand and face washing that precedes ritual prayer is no invention of Moslems. Islamic followers adopted it in the seventh century based on Christian prayer practices. Christians used to wash themselves, or at least their hands, before praying. A water fountain stood in the forecourt of churches precisely for this purpose. In the atrium of St. Peter's in Rome, there stood the famous stone pine fountain. A sarcophagus from Ravenna portrays such a washing bowl: a *cantharus* (deep bowl) adorned with peacocks.

This washing concerned an attitude of purity and integrity in prayer. Precisely because one's hands were raised to heaven while praying, they had to be clean. The believer wanted to be seen by God. So, persons who prayed would show washed hands as a sign that they were not stained with blood. For Christians, washed hands were supposed to express that one entered into God's presence with a pure conscience. "The clean of hand and pure of heart" may go up to the mountain of the Lord, was a Psalm sung by those traveling to the temple in Jerusalem (Ps 24:4).

This explains this prayer posture in the early Church: a person's hands were held relatively close in front of one's face with the palms turned outwards, as is the custom in the Dominican rite even today. It was a way of saying: "Here, God, look at my hands! No blood and no injustice cling to them. And only in this manner do I dare to pray and raise my voice to you." St. John Chrysostom addressed his followers by saying that it was not enough to raise washed hands to God; these hands must also be made holy through works of charity. So, in the forecourt of the church, one should not only go to the fountain for hand washing, but also use the opportunity to give alms to the poor who begged there.

What remains of this rite of hand washing, previously practiced by all of the faithful, is the priest's ritual hand washing before the Eucharistic prayer. The faithful no longer wash their hands, because they also no longer raise their hands when they pray. In its place, people bless themselves with holy water at the church entrance, reminding themselves of their baptism.

These rituals of the past retain their meaning even today. Christian prayer presupposes "clean hands." A person who has sinned against his neighbor also sins against God. In refusing to be reconciled with his neighbor, a person should not approach the altar of God. The act of faith does not simply erase all past and future sins. Our behavior and actions create new obstacles on the way to God, weakening the effectiveness of our prayer. The priest is reminded of his own inadequacy every time he holds up his hands. This automatic gesture should provoke in his mind a serious examination of conscience: what makes you worthy that you alone can raise your hands in prayer? Have you done everything in your power to enable you, with pure hands and full transparency of spirit, to bring before God the gifts and prayers of the people?

Filed Under: [Articles](#) Tagged With: [Featured](#), [January 2012](#)



About Fr. Stefan Heid

Fr. Stefan Heid is professor of the History of Christian Culture, Liturgy, and Hagiography at the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archeology in Rome. He received a degree in Catholic

theology from the University of Bonn, Germany, in 1988, and studied Christian Archaeology and Classical Greek, becoming a vice chairman for the Dept. of the History of the Ancient Church, Patrology and Christian Archeology at the University of Bonn, 1985 to 1986. In 1991, he received a doctorate in theology from the University of Bonn. He was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Cologne in 1994. In 2000, he completed habilitation and *Venia legendi* (independent study and permission to teach) History of the Ancient Church, Patrology and Christian Archaeology. In 2001, he was appointed professor of History of Liturgy and Hagiography at the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology in Rome. In 2004, he was an invited professor of the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome. In 2006, he became vice rector at the Pontifical German College in Rome, Campo Santo Teutonico. In 2007, he became associate professor of the faculty of theology of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome. He then became a Chaplain to His Holiness, Pope Benedict in 2009. Since 2011, he has been director of the Institut of the Goerres-Gesellschaft.

He has been an editor for the quarterly review: *Römische Quartalschrift für Christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte*, and co-editor of *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*. His published books and monographs include: “Chiliasmus und Antichrist-Mythos. Eine frühchristlich Kontroverse um das Heilige Land.” *Hereditas* 6 (Bonn 1993); “Kreuz, Jerusalem, Kosmos: Aspekte frühchristlicher Staurologie” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum. Ergänzungsband* 31 (Münster 2001); *Celibacy in the Early Church. The Beginnings of a Discipline of Obligatory Continence for Clerics in East and West* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000); “Giuseppe Wilpert archeologo cristiano,” *Atti del Convegno*, Roma; Ed. Stefan Heid. May 16-19, 2007, *Sussidi allo Studio delle Antichità Cristiane* 22 (Città del Vaticano 2009); In collaboration with Chr. Gnilka / R. Riesner, *Blutzeuge. Tod und Grab des Petrus in Rom* (Regensburg 2010).

Comments

1. *Deacon Jay Frantz* says:
[January 10, 2012 at 7:21 am](#)

Dear Father Stefan,

Could you provide a link or reference for the Vatican promulgation regarding the crucifix on the altar as there was none in your article (my pastor would like to include in our weekly bulletin as a point of catechesis).

Great article, very informative and educational! Thank you!

2. *Ike* says:
[January 11, 2012 at 11:01 am](#)

Excellent article, Father. I have been encouraging our parish priest to follow the Holy Father's direction (as well as church documents) and reinstate the altar crucifix. I too would like to know of a link or reference for this new directive.

In Corde Jesu

3. *Michelle* says:
[January 16, 2012 at 12:18 pm](#)

Father, I really enjoyed the piece. Would you mind speaking to the trend that has infiltrated parishes in the United States concerning displaying an image of the resurrected Christ in lieu of the Crucifix? A friend of mine brought up the matter when the Altar Society was presenting its plans to decorate the church for Easter. I suggested that such a statue would best be displayed to the side in the area we use for the Nativity scene. The pastor is inclined to follow the Altar Society's request, observing that he could just use the processional cross (which is not a very nice one) in the place of the crucifix during the Easter Season.

◦ *sally perez fong* says:
[January 16, 2012 at 5:42 pm](#)

Dear Fr.Stefan,
 I very much enjoyed this article – thank you! I hope we hear more about this in the near future. Sadly, my own parish needs to read this article.

God Bless You,
 ~ sally ~

■ *EMMA R HERNANDEZ* says:
[January 21, 2012 at 8:30 pm](#)

I agree with Sally our Lord belongs up on the Altar not on the side or in the back as iv'e seen them. Lets bring back the church the way it was, including wemen wearing scarf on thier heads, kneeling for recieving our Lord Jesus Body n Blood.

4. *VBA* says:
[January 18, 2012 at 6:20 am](#)

Thank you Father for an interesting article. I too would like to hear more about the trend of replacing the Crucifix with a Resurrected Christ in “modern” Catholic churches. My parish currently does not have a permanent crucifix in the worship space. There is a smallish one that is carried in for Mass and placed behind the priest. The founding members of my 50 year old parish constantly refer to their parish as being a “resurrected people” and are hostile toward any efforts to replace our current small Crucifix with something larger and permanent. It doesn't help that the church itself is in a half circle, with no tabernacle or kneelers. Anyway, any information I can gather regarding the Crucifix in the church would be most appreciated. Thank you.

◦ *JIM DAVIDSON* says:
[January 22, 2012 at 5:14 pm](#)

THE COMMON SIGN FOR THE EASTERN ORTHADOX CHURCH IS THE RISEN CHRIST !

THE COMMON SIGN FOR THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IS THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST.

I HOPE THIS IS NOT TOO HARD TO UNDERSTAND.

WE MUST RESTRAIN TRYING TO CHANGE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AS WE DID IN THE 1960's AND '70's !

JIM

5. *Mary* says:

[January 21, 2012 at 7:00 am](#)

Well, this would be nice if the priest were not facing the people. If the priest faces the people, the crucifix isn't!

◦ *Kathleen Riney* says:

[January 23, 2012 at 2:00 pm](#)

PERFECT!!!! That's why the priest should be facing the altar, his back to the people, because he is LEADING us! He is acting in "persona Christi", not an entertainer, or story teller.... It seems sort of like the priests have turned their backs on the crucifix for the past 40 yrs.. Of course it was mostly un-intentional. But, being humans, symbols are important to us. They can add to or diminish, anything. I believe this is one Symbol that needs to be re-instated, & maybe that's the point the Vatican is trying to make.

6. *Marie Gamache* says:

[January 21, 2012 at 8:58 am](#)

When they made a change back to the Roman Missal. At our Church, they gave us hand outs about posture for communion. They said, that when we return from communion, we are to stand until we see the last person who received communion is coming back to his seat before we can kneel or stand. For me that does not make sense. I kneel as soon as I return to my seat. I don't believe that this comes from Rome like they said it did. Can you clear this up for us.

God Bless you

Marie

◦ *Elizabeth* says:

[January 22, 2012 at 3:38 pm](#)

There is an editorial in the January issue of Challenge magazine entitled "Lies and Mind Games."

To paraphrase—innovations that have accompanied the new translation include the practice of standing until everyone receives Communion and returns to his seat We are being told that these changes are mandated by Rome. Not true. Why lie?

Please see the videos of Cardinal Arinze and refer to the writings of Pope Benedict. We have been told to stand too to show unity. Instead we now have disunity. Our Bishop is promulgating this change. Confusion reigns and our most sacred time with Jesus is being challenged! For shame! I kneel.

7. *Isabelle DE Mers* says:

[January 21, 2012 at 10:11 am](#)

Those who say we are a resurrected people.... well I say If you do not share in HIS PASSION you will NOT share in HIS GLORY!!!!

8. *Diane* says:

[January 21, 2012 at 11:05 am](#)

A Catholic Church in my area has a life size figure of the Crucified Christ behind the Altar but it is fastened to the wall. no Cross. A woman there told me that it was an old European custom in order to teach that we, the congregation, were the Cross. Can somebody tell me if this is true? It doesn't look very respectful to me.

9. [Father Phil](#) says:
[January 21, 2012 at 3:14 pm](#)

Thank you Father Stefan for historically clarifying the use of the crucifix and the postures during prayers. Anyone who eliminates the Crucifix (Cross) is obviously an enemy of THE CROSS. An enemy of THE CROSS is an enemy of JESUS CHRIST. The Holy Eucharist becomes more meaningful to me a priest, as I celebrate Jesus looking at him conspicuously at the Altar. I do not have enough words to express how profound the graces of God transforms me to the holiness in Jesus Christ which I feel when I see him hanging on the Cross at the center of the altar. Everyone should begin the practice of raising up of hands and eyes to Jesus Christ during any prayers. I would also like you to emphasize on receiving Jesus Christ with unclean hands and not even washing those hands after receiving the Holy Communion.

10. [Pauline o'callaghan](#) says:
[January 22, 2012 at 9:49 am](#)

Great article! I also, would like a link or a Vatican reference, so that I can inform our parish priest.

For many years, we have had a resurrected Christ in the sanctuary, and during the past 3 or so years, a large crucifix at the back of the church. The thinking of our pastor is that the congregation should see the crucifix last thing before they leave the church.

I believe that there is a tiny crucifix, lying flat on the altar, during Mass, but not at all visible to the congregation. ,

Does anyone agree with me, that there is an urgent need for some uniformity in the music and sung responses, now that we have the new translation.? Suddenly, every choir master is a COMPOSER!!!! It is truly an odeal now, to attend Mass, if there is a choir. We also have what can only be described as a, "honk-tonk", electric piano, which is played, at speed!

The only place in Toronto or Mississauga, where one can be sure of hearing SACRED music, is at St. Michael's Cathedral, and in NO other church!!!

11. [George Vazoulas](#) says:
[January 22, 2012 at 10:54 am](#)

I liked everything in this article except for having everyone raise there hands in prayer. Only the priest should use this posture.

12. [Al Garner](#) says:
[January 22, 2012 at 2:04 pm](#)

Where should the true Presence of JESUS CHRIST be on the Altar, MOST IMPORTANT.. Today He is stuck behind the altar, or in a room by himself etc. What was wrong when He was the focal point on entering the church? I walk into a Catholic Church in Pittsburgh and looked around for a few minutes, and asked a cleaning lady where have they put Jesus Christ?? Oh she said behind the altar there are 6 chairs go behind the altar. I am 72 served Mass till the week before I married at 25, never thought this would ever come to pass. We have come a long way on our ride to hell. Our liberal clergy. Soon they will be putting HIM in the garage. Pretty sad if you ask me.

13. *Al Garner* says:

[January 22, 2012 at 2:12 pm](#)

These questions we would love answers LOL never can you find a Bishop or Priest to answer them.

Why did we replace Saturday confession for the Saturday Mass of convenience never ever needed to make it easier for Mass and BUT we sure need confession today ? another one an I will stop, How do you unbless a church to sell it for a bar and leave sacred item still in the bar for use? America liberal Bishops. Double talk! Could come up with a lot more, NEVER any answers!!!

14. *Marie Louise Berger* says:

[January 22, 2012 at 2:37 pm](#)

I would rather have the priest, and altar servers, and anyone else in the area of the altar, not facing the people, but turned together, as the rest of us people, towards the crucifix, on the altar, and on the wall; together as one people facing the Lord, and so worshiping Him as one. That to me and to many other people is the one and only way of truly worshiping God as one; all turned together towards Him; worshiping Him as one. That is the Way. That is the Honourable Way of Worshiping the King of Heaven and Earth. Who are we to sit or stand at His side and face the people? Instead let us all turn towards Him facing in the same direction. We are not there to worship the priest, and to be distracted by the altar servers, looking at us, or anyone else, standing up there. Let's face it, to me that would be the most honourable way of doing it. It would be interesting to know how the early Church did it. Did you ever thought of that. And yes in many places they have taken the Tabernacle to the side somewhere, so as not to offend our brothers protestants maybe. What kind of Christianity is that or should I say catholicism? Did not Christ instituted the Mass and gave it to His Apostles? Did He not instituted the Eucharist which is His Body and Blood? Why do we want to Hide His Holy Presence to the side and out of View somewhere. Is He not the King of Kings , and Lord of Lords? It does not seem like it in our churches and masses anymore. Marie

15. *eva* says:

[January 22, 2012 at 2:42 pm](#)

To Marie:

Upon receiving Communion you may kneel at your pew; one does not have to stand till everyone receives.

Google: "Cardinal Arinze – Dubium – on standing after Communion till all have received."

This asks whether it is the intention of the Roman Missal to forbid the people from kneeling after individually receiving Communion till all have received.

The Response is "negative".....

Hopes this helps.

16. *Mary Smith* says:

[January 23, 2012 at 8:53 am](#)

I should very much like to know whether the practice of raising the chalice and ciborium (or paten), one in each hand, at the 'Through Him.....' is acceptable. I read many years ago that this elevation of the Host was a tradition inspired (centuries ago) by the devotion of the people and we were taught to raise our eyes and gaze. Now when I raise my eyes, all I see is the golden chalice and the golden ciborium – I do not see the consecrated species at all. Another matter: in our parish the use of incense seems to have been permanently dropped. We only have one morning Mass on Sunday at which incense was used, but for some time

now, I have noticed its absence – and I miss it. The use of incense has ancient Biblical roots and conveys the mystery of the altar more than any other symbol; it reminds one to pray the psalm: ‘Let my prayer arise before you as incense, O Lord’

17. [James](#) says:

[January 23, 2012 at 12:23 pm](#)

What about the Tabernacle ??

18. [Carole Tokaruk](#) says:

[January 24, 2012 at 9:40 am](#)

Interesting! Of course in the traditional Latin mass I believe there always was/is a crucifix. But in the new mass I have never seen a crucifix, In one town we visited a Polish priest had put on the altar a crucifix and believe it or not somebody complained about it being there! We are losing our traditions without our knowledge.

19. [Ted H.](#) says:

[January 30, 2012 at 10:01 am](#)

Another article with excellent insights and a continuation of the effort to return a sacred environment and participation to the mass. My comments:

o I love the mass in english as it allows for understanding and participation of all.

o Initially skeptical of the new changes in wording, now that I am coming to understand their meaning and depth I like them (words do have meaning).

o The priest is the presence of Christ amongst us (in persona Christi) why shouldn't he be facing us as he gathers us into the sacrifice of Christ that he is bringing to us and takes us to a more sacred place than we can achieve on our own. Christ wouldn't have turned His back to the Apostles as He celebrated the first consecration. He most likely faced them and gathered them to Him. We do the same at any meal in which we gather family and take nourishment together.

o The suffering Christ on the cross is a very Catholic identification, the Resurrected Christ on the Cross is a very Protestant identification. We are not a resurrected people, we are a people struggling and suffering with the realities of a fallen mankind and go on in the hope that we will become a resurrected people if we pass the test in this world. We are not 'saved' by faith alone. We must work towards being 'saved' by faith and good works. Unfortunately, we have not made it just because we believe and have ben baptized.

o The dual crucifixes of the suffering Christ facing both the priest and the people, prominently displayed, sound about right. Especially if we have to 'raise ourselves up' to view them with reverence.

o Finally, and not a part of this article, next in line should be a reduction in the amount of socializing, expressed camaraderie, and general chit-chat that goes on in the worship space before and often during Mass.

Thanks for a continuation of a great publication.

Ted H.

20. [Ted H.](#) says:

[January 30, 2012 at 10:04 am](#)

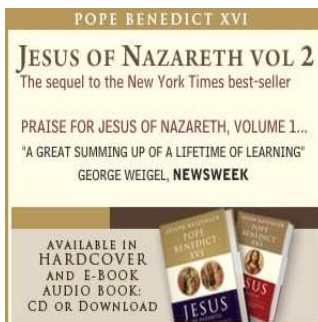
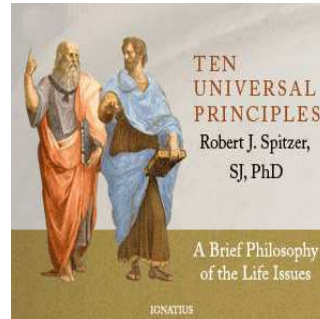
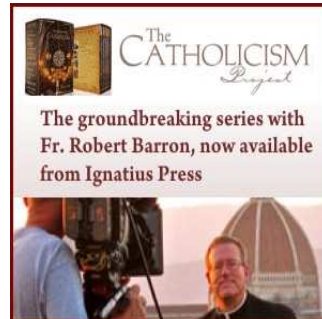
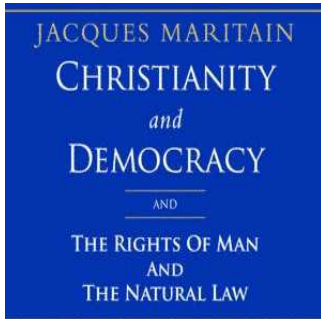
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21. [Rev Fr Stefan Hippler](#) says:

[January 31, 2012 at 10:15 pm](#)

“It would be impolite not to be looking at someone with whom we are conversing.”

This seems to be a typical westernized view – the universal church should, like also in other instances, accept that other cultures have different habits. For me, living and working in Africa, it is amazing to see that western theology seems to ignore that parts of the church simply don't think, understand or feel comfortable the western-latinized way because it goes against their deep rooted culture and tradition.



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