

St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

160 Court Street, Buffalo, New York 14202

Traditionally Speaking by S. Casarotto 7/26/09

FACING THE LORD

In many cultures, the rising sun has been a symbol of God. When entering the mosque, Muslims take off their shoes and wash their feet as a sign of purification and humility as they approach Allah (the Unspeakable). Five times a day, at a specific hour, Muslims spread out their mats and prostrate themselves in prayer facing east (actually, facing Mecca).

In the liturgy, we name Jesus the "Orient, splendor of eternal light and sun of justice." After the Our Father, we pray, "Deliver us from every evil ... as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ."

Heaven is also the place where Christ lives in glory. St. Perpetua is said to have seen four angels who, at the moment of her death, carried her to the East to meet Christ and live with Him forever.

Jesus said: "As the lightening comes from the East... so shall the Son of Man appear (*Mt. 14: 27*)." This echoes the Old Testament that says of God, "The Orient is His name (*Zac. 6, 12*)." This belief is the foundation for the ancient Christian practice of facing east when praying.

In the 4th century, St. Basil tells us: "It is by reason of an unwritten tradition that we turn to the east to pray. But little do we know that we are thus seeking the ancient homeland, the Paradise that God planted in Eden toward the East (*Gn. 2, 8*)."

When a literal eastern orientation was not architecturally possible, as in the adaptation of the ancient Roman basilicas, after Consecration, the deacon invited the faithful to briefly turn their heads in their direction. *Vertite capita vestra Deo!*

On the other hand, we must always remember that the "symbolism" of the East is far less important than the "reality" of the sacramental presence of Christ in the liturgy. Whichever side the priest may be at the altar and wherever the faithful may be in a Catholic church (nave, transepts, behind the altar), we are in the presence of Christ. Certainly, He is facing us! Parents should teach their children how and why we genuflect in a Catholic Church, to look at the Tabernacle and adore the Lord. At Consecration, let us look at the raised Host and say with the Apostle Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" Likewise, adults should set a good example and show that they are truly concerned about the divine presence more than on which side of the altar the priest stands. Idle talking and laughing in church, irreverence, and spiritual indignity - especially sacrilege - and lack of adoration are a mockery of true orientation of Christian prayer and life.