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DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA  
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP  
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January 25, 2022

Dear Monsignor/Father,

At the beginning of this present Liturgical year, the Diocese became aware that some priests were celebrating the Roman Rite according to the current Roman Missal *ad orientum*, at least on occasion. It is known that certain Catholic groups promote this practice and assert that it is the "right" of a priest to choose this form of celebration. Therefore, to prevent confusion going forward, allow me to remind all of the norms of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, which can be found in the Roman Missal and online at the USCCB website.


The General Instruction calls for the altar of the church to be built in such a way "that Mass can be celebrated at it facing the people, *which is desirable wherever possible*" (cf. GIRM # 299—Emphasis added). The norms also anticipate that the situation might be that an existing altar "is so positioned that it makes the people's participation difficult but cannot be moved without damage to artistic value." In these cases, the General Instruction directs that another altar should be erected "*and the sacred rites celebrated on it alone*" (cf. GIRM # 303 *emphasis added*). The plain meaning of these norms is that when celebrating the Mass according to the current Roman Missal, it is expected that the orientation of the priest will be facing the people. Any other interpretation of the norms is mistaken.

A guiding principle of the General Instruction is that Celebrants should make determinations about applying its norms based on "what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice" (cf. GIRM # 42). As Ordinary, I am obligated to exercise vigilance over the whole of the Diocese's liturgical life. In that role, I must say that I do not know of a church in the Diocese where it is impossible to celebrate facing the people, which is desirable. As Pope Francis stated in *Traditionis Custodes*, "The liturgical books promulgated by Saint Paul VI and Saint John Paul II, in conformity with the decrees of Vatican Council II, are the unique expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite.... Previous norms, instructions, permissions, and customs that do not conform to the provisions of the present Motu Proprio are abrogated" (*Traditionis Custodes* Articles 1&8). Therefore, any "right" to use the rubrics of the Roman Missal of 1962 presumed to be given in *motu proprio-Summorum Pontificum*, no longer have the force of law.

Therefore, Priests in the Diocese of Venice should celebrate the liturgy facing the people and not impose their own private choices when celebrating a Mass with a congregation. What is done at Masses "without a congregation" is left to the Celebrant's discretion. In any case, no priest can celebrate a public mass *ad orientum* without the Ordinary's written permission. With pastoral concern, I ask priests to abide by the norms in the General Instruction and not create confusion about the proper celebration of the Roman Rite. Thank you for your understanding in this matter.

Please be assured that you and the faithful of your Parish are remembered in prayer. May God bless each of you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

  
+ Frank J. Dewane  
Bishop of the Diocese of  
Venice in Florida