



Bishop Edward J. Slattery celebrates Mass for the Second Sunday of Advent in the *ad orientem* position in Tulsa's Holy Family Cathedral.

Bishop restores *ad orientem* Mass

►► During the Christmas cycle, Bishop Edward J. Slattery celebrated Mass at Holy Family Cathedral facing the crucifix on the altar, a liturgical style called *ad orientem*, which had been largely abandoned since the 1960s.

While many Cathedral parishioners welcomed the restoration and described its effect as an increased ability to understand that the Mass is our worship of the Father in and through the Sacrifice of Jesus, other parishioners might have been confused, thinking that the Bishop had turned his back on them.

Historically, Christians have turned toward the east to pray, and when they offered Mass, the priest and the people naturally faced the same direction. There was no sense that the celebrant had turned his back on the people or intended to show any hostility. Rather, everyone understood that the priest and the congregation shared a common posture. By standing to face the direction from which Christ would return, they demonstrated what it meant for the Church to stay vigilant and to “keep watch for Christ’s second coming.”

The Bishop celebrated the Mass in English but *ad orientem* for three reasons. First, he explained, because it better represents what the Mass is all about, showing – quite visibly – that the people and the priest are united in a single action, offering one sacrifice, but offering it in their proper roles, the people joined to Christ as his Body and the priest configured to Christ as the Head of the Body.

This ancient practice also avoids giving the impression that the priest and the congregation are engaged in a conversation *about* God, rather than the worship *of* God. The third reason was that it reduces the temptation to regard the celebrant as an actor on a liturgical stage. When he and the congregation together face forward to Christ, it makes it easier to visualize that the priest is offering the Mass in the person of Christ