



## Advent 2020 Season of Renewed Hope

Here we are, in Advent, 2020 ...guests at the Lord's table once again, after our experience of COVID-19! We are spaced out, but we are here. But not quite back to the old 'normal'. We have moved the Lord's table. Why?

Sixty years after the second Vatican Council we are still learning what the vision of Vatican II was about. In the old model of celebrating liturgy the priest and the altar were separate from the people (actually separated by altar rails). This was yet another expression, in bricks and mortar, of clericalism. The priest did the important work of celebrating mass and the people just watched. One of the learnings from Vatican II was that the liturgy is the work of the whole community of the baptised.

If we consider a seating plan for a theatre, the audience sits quite separately from the stage. That is the way we have traditionally sat at mass! The arrangement is perfect if we all want to watch a performance by the actors on stage -- but is that what we are when we assemble for the Eucharist? In liturgy I am part of the production, we are all in it together, we are all actors in the Christ as his sisters and brothers in baptism.

Why is it important to create a new space?

**First**, if we are to experience anew the promises of Jesus -- which is the meaning of 'remember' -- then we have to have an adequate location for those experiences. A gathering around the table, when remembered, means we gather around a table!

**Second**, during COVID-19 many have asked if 'going to Mass made much difference?'

This can only be answered by offering a new, renewed, experience: only when I know what I am taking a part in can it really make sense to me.

If I feel it is 'just an event I attend,' (like going to the theatre) then there is little reason why we should not simply have it as a performance we tune into on a computer or watch on TV.

**Third**, when we do not actually do what we say we are doing - sitting at table, gathered to the Supper, and being around the Lord's table --, the whole experience can seem false, confusing, or irrelevant.

And **fourth**, when we say that the Eucharist is the centre and summit of Christian life, that each person, a baptised brother or sister, is equal in dignity, we need to express what we say in the way our church is arranged. All are around the table, and the Lord's Table is the focal point. Changing the space is a small step in undoing the clericalism, which is deforming the Church and is rejected by Pope Francis.

The table is the centre and each person is called to respect everyone else as fellow pilgrims.

Let's pray in renewed hope that we, fellow pilgrims, will grow in intimacy with Jesus as we indeed gather around his table this Advent.

Adapted from O'Loughlin, Thomas. "Thinking after COVID-19: guests at the Lord's table" October 01, 2020.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/thinking-after-covid-19-guests-at-the-lords-table/13105> Thomas

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