



# Ask Fr. Mike

## **Why are we reading the Epistle facing the Altar?**

### **Why have we decided to do this now?**

Due to Covid, for the last two years our epistles have been read by the cantors by necessity. The re-introduction of Lectors and Lay readers makes this an appropriate moment for this change. I have given my reasons for this change in the short teaching I provided through our livestream: [Divine Liturgy - December 5th, 2021 - YouTube](#) (Starting at about 1:49:00).

The location we have recently adopted is the one prescribed by our service books in the *Ordo Celebratonis* #125 (the book instructing us how to serve) and reinforced in the *1996 Instruction for Applying Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. Although facing east in the centre of the Church is the traditional posture and location of reading the Epistle, I don't appeal to this tradition in my explanation. I encourage you to take a look at this video if you haven't had a chance yet. Any change is difficult if we don't understand the *why* of the change itself.

The biggest reason for this change is to reinforce the understanding of the liturgical action of *proclaiming* the epistle as opposed to simply *reading* it. All our parishioners, after all, have the text itself in front of them in the bulletin. It is not simply a question of function. The second reason is to emphasize the special nature of the *scripture* being shared. The epistle is the inspired word of God and so reading it in a special location from a special book follows from its special nature. It is appropriate to set this action apart from other (good) things that we do: after-liturgy announcements, eulogies etc. which are read from the podium.

Although there is some concern that the reader's "back is to the people" I would encourage the similar understanding of the eastern orientation of priest or deacon directing the prayers of the people. The focus is not on them but on the Lord who they are imploring. I have heard the comment recently that there is a sense of relief that "all eyes aren't on me/him/her" when reading or hearing the epistle but instead the focus is on what is proclaimed.

I understand this is a significant change, and change is never easy. I am sympathetic to the confusion and even (misplaced) guilt/defensiveness that might arise over this. However, I'm confident that we will adapt and even embrace this practice with a little time and patience.

**Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!**