

December 29, 2016 (Feast of St. Thomas Becket).

Dear members of St. John the Apostle Parish:

This letter comes your way as a result of the most recent Parish Council meeting, during which some members encouraged me to clarify the reasons behind a few recent changes made in the Church. In my mind, as changes go, the few I made early on were relatively minor and all enacted in accord with either church rubrics or the legitimate options afforded to the pastor: but it seems some may have found them a bit disconcerting: I am sorry if this was the case; and offer the following explanation for the few changes in question:

1) Adjusting the seating of the clergy and altar servers:

You will find in many, if not most, parishes/cathedrals, etc., that the altar servers are seated in separate areas from the clergy (as per the Church's rubrics and guidelines), sometimes in the sanctuary...sometimes not: a lot depends upon the size and configuration of the sanctuary, etc. The guideline being that the seating placement of the servers (acolytes) is conducive to the fulfillment of their responsibilities: having the servers seated behind the priest was/is, in my opinion, more difficult for communication with them...and having them seated next to the priest...in the chairs that are used by other clergy (deacon, priest, etc.) ...is not correct per the rubrics of the Church. I am providing the following guidance, from the Church, as to the seat placement of the priest and other ministers (i.e. --altar servers):

a) #310. (From the General Instruction of the Roman Missal): "The chair of the Priest Celebrant must signify his function of presiding over the gathering and of directing the prayer. Thus the more suitable place for the chair is facing the people at the head of the sanctuary, unless the design of the building or other features prevent this: as, for example, if on account of too great a distance, communication between the Priest and the congregation would be difficult, or if the tabernacle were to be positioned in the center behind the altar...It is appropriate that before being put into liturgical use, the chair be blessed according to the rite described in the Roman Ritual. Likewise, seats should be arranged in the sanctuary for concelebrating Priests as well as for Priests who are present at the celebration in choir dress but without concelebrating. The seat for the Deacon should be placed near that of the celebrant. For the other ministers seats should be arranged so that they are clearly distinguishable from seats for the clergy and so that the ministers are easily able to carry out the function entrusted to them.[120]".

b) #10. (From the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops guidelines for Altar Servers): "Servers should be seated in a place from which they can easily assist the priest celebrant and deacon. The place next to the priest is normally reserved for the deacon or concelebrating priests".

c) # 189. (From the General Instruction of the Roman Missal): "Through the entire celebration, it is for the acolyte (server) to approach the Priest or the Deacon, whenever necessary, in order to present the book to them and to assist them in any other way required. Thus it is appropriate that, in so far as possible, the acolyte should occupy a place from which he can easily carry out his ministry at the chair or at the altar".

2) re-arranging the candles on the Church altar:

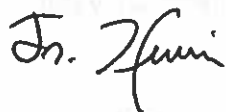
The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) states the following with regard to the use of candles: "The candles...are to be appropriately placed either on or around the altar in a way suited to the design of the altar and the sanctuary so that the whole may be well balanced and not interfere with the faithful's clear view of what takes place on the altar or what is placed on it"(no. 307, 117) I felt that the previous arrangement of the candles impeded that "clear view"...and as the number (from 2-6 are allowed) and placement of the altar candles is according to the Pastor's preference...I chose to change the arrangement to provide for better viewing: for both priest and congregation.

3) Switching the crucifix on the altars (church and chapel)...for one that lies flat:

The crucifix on the altar is meant for the priest...and its size, style, etc. is a matter of personal preference: of the Pastor. My preference is for a crucifix that lies flat. Please note that the processional cross and/or other fixed crucifix in the Sanctuary (in our case at the very top...over the tabernacle) ...fulfill the General Instruction of the Roman Missal requirement for a Crucifix that is clearly visible for the congregation.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this letter...I hope the explanations will serve to clarify things for those who may have had some questions about these changes. Going forward, as I have already been doing through my previous letters, I will continue to keep you informed of items of interest that may affect the parish, its programs, liturgies, etc. In closing, thank you all for your continued prayers and support; and please know that you remain in my prayers on a daily basis.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Kevin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. Kevin