

### **Item #13 (On the Centrality of the Mass)**

On June 18, 2018, I celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. In commemoration of this and other anniversaries occurring in the USA Central and Southern Province of the Society of Jesus I was asked to write a summary of what this anniversary meant to me. The summary follows.

My ordination to the priesthood took place on June 18, 1958, in the chapel of St. Mary's College, St. Marys, Kansas. The ordaining prelate was the Most Rev. Edward J. Hunkeler, archbishop of the Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kansas. In his sermon Archbishop Hunkeler said that the most important thing we would do as priests would be to celebrate Mass. This statement found me in profound agreement, for in Holy Redeemer Grade School in Webster Groves, Missouri, and in St. Louis University High School in St. Louis, at Florissant and at St. Louis University during my early years as a Jesuit, I always placed the Mass at the center of my life. After ordination I was stationed overseas for fifty years at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and Jerusalem, and with degrees from there and from the University of Oxford I was helped to understand the background of the Mass in Judaism and early Christianity. In teaching students from dozens of countries at the Biblical Institute and at Mother Teresa's novitiate in Rome I came to appreciate the centrality of the Mass even more, as I witnessed the majestic dignity of the liturgies of Catholicism's epicenter. The Eucharist will always be the heart of what it means to believe that Christ is really with us always. It is this faith that I witness to as I teach a course on the High Priesthood

of Jesus Christ at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary to seminarians from the western Midwest of the United States.

Back when I was still a boy in elementary school I was moved by some inner force to attend daily Mass as often as I could. Looking back I can say that what the Mass did for me was to help prepare me for my vocation to the priesthood, though I did not realize it at the time. I did not begin to think seriously about becoming a priest until I was a senior in high school. The centrality of the Mass is of crucial importance today in the United States where it is said that well over half of U.S. Catholics do not believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In my thoughts on the Gospel of John I try to point out what seems to me is the overlooked presence of the Eucharistic Christ in the Prologue of this Gospel. Disbelief in the Real Presence began with the first followers of Jesus, of course (see John 6,66), and this fact should continue to be brought to the attention of all Catholics today, no matter where they are. For the opposite—belief in the Real Presence—is the central factor in the life of the Catholic Church today, and will be unto the end of time. It has been the central factor in my life and will be until I die. **(July 2, 2019)**