

Item #62 (75 and Counting)

The present writer recently (August 8, 2020) celebrated the 75th anniversary of his entrance into the Society of Jesus, Because of the virus the celebration was somewhat muted. Below is summary originally written before August 8, followed by some reflections after the event with some musing on how the observance of anniversaries can help one to read Scripture better.

Fr. James H. Swetnam, S.J., 75th Anniversary of Entrance into the Society of Jesus, St. Stanislaus Seminary, Florissant, Missouri, August 8, 1945

Divine Providence and I began writing the story of my life with the help of two loving parents and two loving sisters. A Catholic grade school, Holy Redeemer in Webster Groves, Missouri, and Saint Louis University High School, together with my family, prepared me for a life focused on the Mass (March 18, 1928 — August 8, 1945). After August 8, 1945, there followed two years of Jesuit novitiate and two years of classical language study at Florissant, three years of philosophy at Saint Louis University, three years of teaching Greek, Latin and Speech at Regis High School in Denver, Colorado, and four years of studying theology at Saint Mary's College at St. Marys, Kansas. Then the third year of novitiate ("tertianship") in Sankt Andrä-im-Lavanttal in Austria. Next, the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome for fifty years, from 1960 to 2010. For the first two years as a student in the Faculty of Sacred Scripture. Then, also as an editor of some of the Institute's publications. Then, in 1963, also as teacher of the basics of New Testament Greek, 1963-2003 (involved were about 1500 students from about 85 countries), punctuated by three years for a doctorate in New Testament at the University of Oxford. Then, on

retirement from teaching, the first director of the alumni association at the Institute and eventually working in 45 countries. Back in the U.S.A., teaching, retreat-giving, and residing part-time in Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis for a number of years. My current website, “James Swetnam’s Thoughts on Scripture”, is centered on the Mass and Christ’s Real Presence in the Eucharist, and is being read in dozens of countries and dozens of U.S. states.

Scripture is God’s Inspired Word. That is, even centuries after it was written it continues to function as an instrument of God’s action on those who read it with faith. It is my contention that reflection on one’s past life can help one deepen one’s faith and so enhance one’s receptivity for God’s action in one’s life through the reading of His Inspired Word.

As I look back on my life, both before and after I became a Jesuit I realize how central in my life has been the Sacrifice of the Mass. My understanding of the Mass when I was in elementary school was much inferior to what it is now, on the other side of much study that enables me to offer the Mass with enormously increased perspicacity. But to focus only on me is to ignore the action of Christ in the Mass, action that helped me decide to enter the Society of Jesus and persevere.

In view of the above reflections on the role of the Mass in my life there is one text of Scripture that I think appropriate for me to

reflect on and to suggest to others for whom the Mass is (or should be) central to their existence. The text is Luke 22,19: “Do this in remembrance of me”. That this command of the Lord was acted on is witnessed to in Scripture;; by St. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 11, verses 24 and 25.

One must remember that we are dealing here with an inspired text. That means that the Spirit Who inspired the original authors of these texts is still active in the text (see above, Item #32). Further, the command of Jesus has to do not with the realm of Scripture but with the realm of Tradition (see above, Item #4).

As a priest all this can be evoked by me as I take part in the concelebrations of the Mass on a daily basis. The Jesus who helped me as a child to follow the lead of Providence in seeking God’s will is still the same Jesus Who guides me to the encounter with Him at the particular judgment—and Who guide me to help others along the same path. For those of the Catholic faith who read this text, no matter what their age or status, all this should be of consummate interest. **(5 November 2020, Feast of All the Saints of the Society of Jesus)**