



James Swetnam, SJ ***60 Years in the Priesthood***

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 Saint 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 50 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.

