

# Meméto



## THE PRIESTLY FRATERNITY OF ST. PETER

CHRISTMAS ISSUE  
JANUARY 2022

*Laudetur Jesus Christus!*

As we prepare for the celebration of Christmas, such bad news abounds in the world and even in the Church that it can be tempting to quote Ebenezer Scrooge, or at least not to give much more than a perfunctory thought to the mystery of Christmas and the joy of Christ's Nativity.

But, of course, that is just what the devil wants us to do—to focus our attention on problems, concerns, difficulties... on anything but Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church includes part of Pope St. Leo the Great's teaching on the joy of Christmas in her traditional Christmas Matins:

“To all, there is the one same cause of joy: for, Our Lord, the destroyer of sin and death, came to deliver all, seeing that all were slaves to guilt. Let the just soul exult, because he is now brought near to his crown; let the sinner rejoice, because he is invited to his pardon; let the Gentile be of good heart, because he is called to life. For, when there had come the fullness of time, fixed by the inscrutable depths of the divine counsel, the Son of God assumed to himself the nature of man, in order to restore it to the favor of its Maker; that thus, the devil, the author of death, might be conquered by that very nature, whereby himself had conquered.”<sup>1</sup>

This Christmas, let us turn our focus to Our Lord. God has not abandoned us to the vicissitudes of life or to the horrors of sin. In fact, He has loved us so much that He has taken on human nature and come to save us. Furthermore, God desires us to love Him in return. He could have entered the world as a great warrior, a mighty king, or a wise philosopher, but

He came as a tiny Infant to win not only our reverence, but also our love. Who are we that God should desire our love? The immeasurably vast universe in which we live is less than a grain of sand in comparison to God, and yet He desires to dwell in our souls through sanctifying grace. He calls the just to grow closer to Him and promises an everlasting crown of glory to those who persevere in His love and friendship. He calls sinners to come back to Him, to repent of their sins, to go to confession and live in His love. He calls all who have never known Him to be baptized, to join the Church, His Mystical Body, and live in His life. And through His Incarnation, He works for our salvation, which is accomplished in His passion, death, and resurrection.

We can never be grateful enough for God's infinite love for us. May the consideration of the Divine Infant in the arms of His Holy Mother stir up our love in return. The awesome fact of being loved by God and loving Him in return should help put everything else in our lives into the proper perspective. I wish you all a very Blessed Christmas! ✝

*Fr. William Lawrence, FSSP*

Fr. William Lawrence, FSSP  
North American Provincial

*Christus Natus est Pro Nobis—  
VENITE ADOREMUS!*

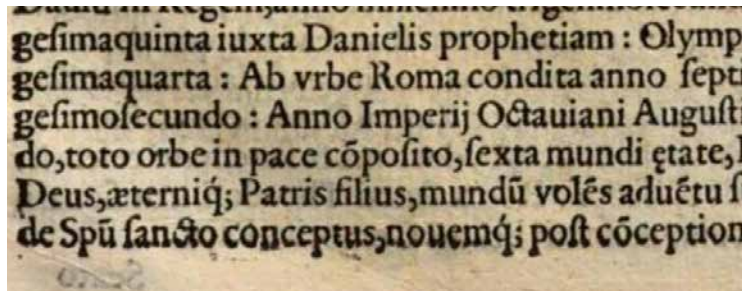
<sup>1</sup> Pope Leo I, *Sermo 1 de Nativitate Domini*

# CHRISTMAS EVE PRIME: THE WHOLE WORLD AT PEACE

Fr. William Rock, FSSP

In the early morning of December 24, the Vigil of Christmas, Christmas Eve Day, those in choir hear sung, as part of the Office of Prime, the Christmas Proclamation. After recounting how many years have passed since various historical events, the Proclamation declares that:

...in the 752nd year from the foundation of the city of Rome, in the 42nd year of the reign of the Emperor Octavian Augustus, in the 6th age of the world, while the whole world was at peace, Jesus Christ, Himself Eternal God and Son of the Eternal Father, being pleased to hallow the world by His most gracious coming, having been conceived of the Holy Ghost, and when nine months were passed after His conception, was born of the Virgin Mary at Bethlehem of Juda made Man, Our Lord Jesus Christ was born according to the flesh.



The phrase, “while the whole world was at peace” (*toto Orbe in pace compósito*) is an interesting one and naturally gives rise to the question:

*Was the whole world actually at peace?*

To answer this question, we must look at what peace would have meant to a Roman living at the time, as, after all, Our Lord was born in, more-or-less, a part of Roman Empire.

In the Forum at Rome stood a temple dedicated to the Roman deity Janus. This temple was created by the second King of Rome, Numa Pompilius. Particular to this temple was that it had a set of doors at either end. These “Gates of

Janus,” as they were called, were opened when Rome was at war and closed when Rome was at peace.

Plutarch, in his *Life of Numa*, wrote about this Temple as follows:



There is a temple to him [Janus] in Rome, which has two doors, and which they call the gate of war. It is the custom to open the temple in time of war, and to close it during peace. This scarcely ever took place, as the empire was almost always at war with some state, being by its very greatness continually brought into collision with the neighbouring tribes.

In fact, prior to the rule of Augustus Caesar, the Gates of Janus were only closed twice, once in 700 B.C., during Numa’s reign, and again in 253 B.C., after the First Punic War.

But what was the status of the Gates of Janus during the time of Augustus Caesar, during the time of the birth of Our Lord? In his *Res Gestae* (sections 2.41-2.45), Augustus tells us the following:

(The temple of) Janus Quirinus, which our ancestors wished to be closed whenever peace had been obtained,

on land and sea, throughout the entire realm of the Roman people, was decreed by the Senate to be closed three times during my time as emperor; even though it is handed down to memory, that before I was born, it had been closed a grand total of two times since the founding of the city.



During Augustus' reign, the Gates of Janus were closed a remarkable three times! From the writings of Cassius Dio, we learn that the Gates were closed in 29 B.C. and 25 B.C. There is some dispute among scholars as to when the third closing of gates occurred, but the Christian Priest Paulus Orosius, a contemporary and companion of St. Augustine and St. Jerome (4th-5th Century A.D.), assigned this third closing to the year of the Birth of Christ (*In Paganos* 6.22.1, 5):

And so, in the 752nd year from the foundation of the City of Rome, Caesar Augustus...then himself closed the Gates of Janus for the third time...Therefore at that time—in other words, in that year in which, ordained by God, Caesar arranged the most firm and most true peace—Christ was born...

It should be noted that Orosius places the birth of Our Lord in the 752nd year since the founding of the City of Rome, which is the same date given in the Christmas Proclamation. Unfortunately, as was indicated above, not all scholars agree with Orosius's assertion.

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*“In that year in which,  
ordained by God,  
Caesar arranged  
the most firm and  
most true peace,  
Christ was born.”*

*—Paulus Orosius*

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But even if Orosius's assertion that the third closing of the Gates of Janus corresponded with the Birth of Christ is not historically accurate, it is clear that the Roman world was experiencing at that time an unparalleled period of peace. The Gates of Janus had only been closed twice during the 700 some-odd years between the dedication of the Temple of Janus and the reign of Augustus, during which it was closed a remarkable three times.

Having the Gates closed three times within one lifetime would have most assuredly been seen by the people of Rome as indicating a time of unmatched peace, a time when one could safely state, even if there were some military engagements occurring, that “the whole world was at peace.” ✚

*Thanks are due to Mr. Jared Copeland for his assistance on this article.*

# THE THREE MASSES OF CHRISTMAS

Dr. David Arias  
Professor of Philosophy  
Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary

Christmas is quite unusual, liturgically speaking. For almost every day on the liturgical calendar has only one Mass which is proper to it. But like All Souls' Day, Christmas stands apart from these more normal days inasmuch as it has three distinct Masses proper to it. The three Masses of Christmas are: the Mass at midnight, the Mass at dawn, and the Mass during the daytime. The ancient character of the tradition of celebrating three Masses on Christmas can be gleaned from a passing remark of Pope St. Gregory the Great in one of his homilies: "By God's generosity, we shall be celebrating three Masses today, and so we cannot speak at length on the Gospel reading."

Why, since ancient times, has the Church celebrated three distinct Masses on Christmas? The answer is to glorify the Blessed Trinity on account of the three births or nativities of the Eternal Word. Beautifully describing this reason, Dom Prosper Guéranger writes:

"But such is the greatness of today's Mystery, that the Church is not satisfied with only once offering up the Holy Sacrifice.

The long expected and precious Gift deserves an unusual welcome. God the Father has given His Son to us; and it is by the operation of the Holy Ghost that the grand Portent is produced: let there be, then, to the ever Blessed Three, the homage of a triple Sacrifice. Besides, this Jesus, who is born tonight, is born thrice. He is born of the Blessed Virgin, in the stable of Bethlehem; He is born by grace, in the hearts of the Shepherds, who are the first fruits of the Christian Church; and He is born eternally from the bosom of the Father, in the brightness of the Saints: to this triple birth, therefore, let there be the homage of a triple sacrifice."

St. Thomas Aquinas also speaks of these three births of the Eternal Word. He teaches that the first birth of the Word is eternal and spiritual in nature. The Nicene Creed describes this birth as follows: "the only-begotten Son of God, [was] born of the Father before all ages, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things were made." By contrast, the second and most manifest birth of the Word is His temporal and bodily birth of the blessed Virgin Mary. The *Athanasian Creed* explicitly compares this birth with the Divine Word's eternal birth:

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*"Such is the greatness  
of today's Mystery,  
that the Church is  
not satisfied with only  
once offering up the  
Holy Sacrifice."*

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"Now the true faith requires us to believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is both God and man. He is God, begotten of the substance of the Father before the world began; He is man, born of the substance of His Mother into the world."

Now our Lord's temporal and bodily birth is for the sake of His third birth, namely, His temporal and spiritual birth in the souls of men. Indeed, the *Nicene Creed*

teaches that the second birth was "for us men and for our salvation." And St. John's *Prologue* puts it thus: "But to as many as received Him, He gave the power to become sons of God: to them that believe in His Name, who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (1:12-13).

Although the three Masses of Christmas are intended to give homage to the three births of the Divine Word, none of these Masses gives exclusive homage to any one of the three births. Rather, the three births are all alluded to more or less explicitly in each of the three Masses. Still, St. Thomas teaches

that certain parts or aspects of each of these Masses serve to highlight one or the other births of our Lord.

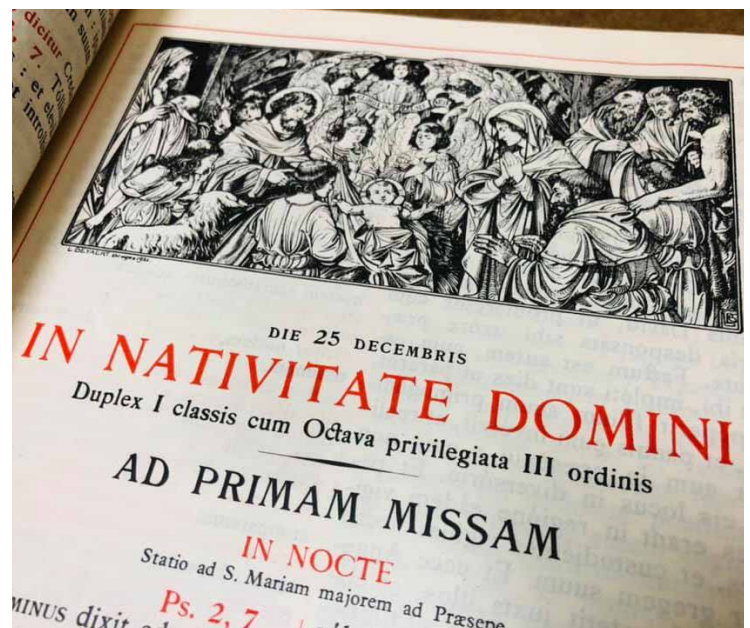
For example, the Mass at midnight, on account of the time when it is said, expresses the hiddenness from us of the eternal birth of the Word. And, thus, the *Introit* for that Mass reads in part: “The Lord said to me: Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee.” On the other hand, the Gospel for the Mass at midnight describes our Lord’s birth in Bethlehem, and therefore highlights His temporal and bodily birth.

The Mass at dawn seems to highlight especially the temporal and spiritual birth of the Word in the souls of Christians. For the Collect says, “Grant us, we beseech Thee, almighty God, that we on whom the new light of Thine Incarnate Word is poured, may show forth in our works that brightness which does now illuminate our minds by faith.” And immediately after the Collect for that Mass is a prayer of commemoration of St. Anastasia who, as a martyr of the early Church, manifests the supernatural transformation which can be caused by the birth of Christ in one’s soul.

Finally, the Mass during daytime brings to the fore the eternal and spiritual birth of God the Son. For in the Epistle we read, “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature,

upholding the universe by His word of power” (Hebrews 1:1-3). And the Gospel for this Mass is the very prologue from St. John’s Gospel, the beginning of which focuses on the eternal birth of God the Son: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Accordingly, the reading of the last Gospel is omitted at the end of this third Mass of Christmas.

Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene assists us in understanding a profound unity which is found in these three births of the Divine Word. He writes: “The three Christmas Masses place before us a majestic picture: the touching description of the birth of Jesus as man alternates with the sublime one of the eternal birth of the Word in the bosom of the Father; and there are also allusions to Christ’s birth in our souls by grace. However, this three-fold birth is but one single manifestation of God who is Charity. No one on earth could know God’s love; but the Word, who is in the bosom of the Father, knows it and can reveal it to us. The Word was made flesh and has shown to us the love of God. Through the Word, God’s incomprehensible, invisible charity is made manifest and tangible in the sweet little Babe, who from the manger holds out His arms to us.” Indeed, as our blessed Savior holds out His arms to us, He wants to be born anew in our souls; He wants each of us to become an *alter Christus* in the world. This Christmas, then, let us each welcome our blessed Lord into the stable of our soul, and let us make our own the words from the Preface for Christmas: “...through the Mystery of the Word made flesh, new radiance from Thy glory has so shone on the eye of the soul that the recognition of our God made visible draws us to love what is invisible.” ✝



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# FROM THE ARCHIVES: THE BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOR

by a Fraternity Priest  
Originally published Dec. 2001

We know that every hour of Our Savior's life here on earth served to love and glorify His Heavenly Father, and also, at the same time, to give us an example of how we too may glorify God and deepen our union of supernatural life and friendship with Him. For those who seek to follow Our Lord's virtues and example, it is easy to relate to His hidden life, the years He spent with Our Lady and St. Joseph in Nazareth, working for a living as a carpenter; and also to His three years of public ministry, travelling the roads of the Holy Land to preach and establish the Kingdom of God; and even to the sufferings of His Sacred Passion and death. In each of these, we can find example and instruction for our own lives, and seek to take a Christ-like approach and attitude in all things. But how do we relate to Our Lord in His Divine infancy? What virtue is there for us to imitate in this stage of His life?

We know that the virtue which must underpin every other virtue is humility. Charity is the greatest of the virtues, and must animate all of them, but humility is the predisposition for them all, including charity itself. Where there is no humility, there is pride, which loves self inordinately, to the exclusion of others and eventually of God Himself. Without humility, even good and virtuous acts can have at their root a self-loving or self-serving motive, and so do not glorify God since they do not spring from love of Him, for charity and love of self are mutually exclusive. Hence, humility is the indispensable foundation of any life of virtue, and this is what Our Lord teaches us by His coming into the world and His earliest years.

Remember that, unlike any other child born in this world, Our Lord did have the choice of who were to be His parents, and where and when He was to be born. He was coming into this world to change its entire history, to re-establish the Kingdom of His Father in the hearts of all men. The wisdom of this world would therefore propose that, for such

a work, He should choose to be born into wealth and power and prestige. He should be born into the imperial family in Rome, political and military center of the world, and so have unlimited power, with armies to command, so as to compel His will on men. Or He should have been born in Athens, cultural and philosophical center of the world, and become a great orator, to impress and sway men with His education and rhetoric. Or even born to one of the aristocratic families in Jerusalem, religious center of His own people, where He could have grown in a position of religious authority and influence, with the respect and support of the whole people. But no: Our Lord chose to be born in a stable in Bethlehem, to an impoverished family of no fame or renown, and grow up

in Nazareth, a town whose name was a byword for provincialism amongst the Jews.

Our Lord came into this world not to influence men by the standards of the world but by a whole new ideal, one which turns the standards of this world on their head. *Blessed are the poor in spirit ... Blessed are the meek ... Blessed are they that mourn ... Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake ..* (Matt 5:3-12). In the Beatitudes, we see that what the world despises and shuns can serve the purposes of God and become a path of holiness leading souls to heaven.

Yet this is a lesson which many souls have yet to really learn - it is at the root of the problem of why so many souls do not progress in virtue. Do we follow Our Lord in such a humility? Do we regret our own humble origins, when He chose them for His birth? Do we seek the friendship of the rich and influential, and want to be seen in their company, when Our Lord was born in obscurity, the King of Kings growing up unknown by all His neighbors? Do we begrudge the fact that we have to work for our living, and envy the rich, when He, *through Whom all things were made* (John 1 :3), chose to be born into such a family, and, after St. Joseph's death, earned a living by the work of His hands to feed and shelter Himself



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and His blessed Mother? Here is a whole spiritual school of humility which we discover just by contemplating the Divine Infant lying in His manger. So often we say that we could be better people or live better lives if we had had a better start in life, or more influential friends, or a different education, or better chances or career prospects. But what will these get us in terms of eternity? What will they count for when we stand in the sight of our Divine Judge?

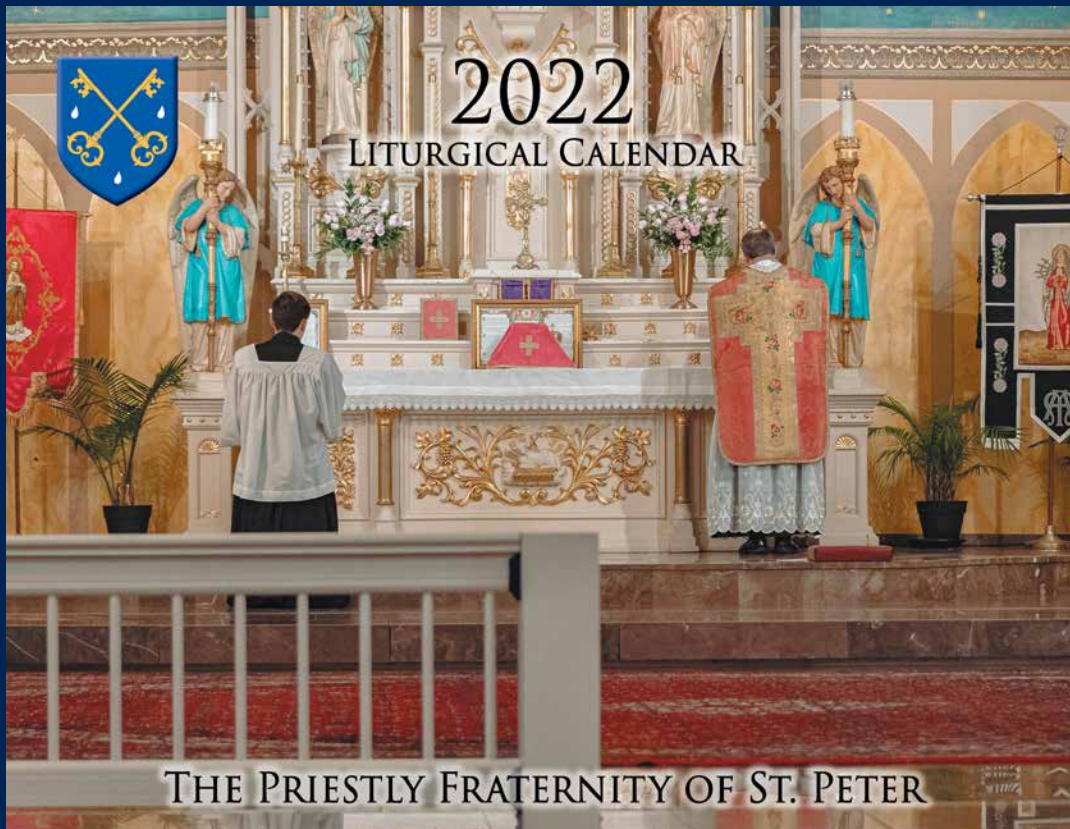
By the very circumstances of His birth, He preaches to us already from the manger, and by a very real and practical lesson. His birth in a stable was not a gesture, a show of humility, but the very foundation of His life, this same life which He seeks to teach to us and share with us. He teaches us the lessons of humility, poverty and mortification. There is no visible splendor or magnificence by which the worldly are drawn, dazzled in their shallow fashion, nor the lowly are overawed and afraid to approach. There is but the innocence and simplicity of a newborn child, with none of the pomp of the world, since He wants to draw us to the invisible things of God, and say to us *Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you* (Matt 11 :28).

By contemplating the Son of God in His manger, we realize that often we are heavy burdened, because we have loaded

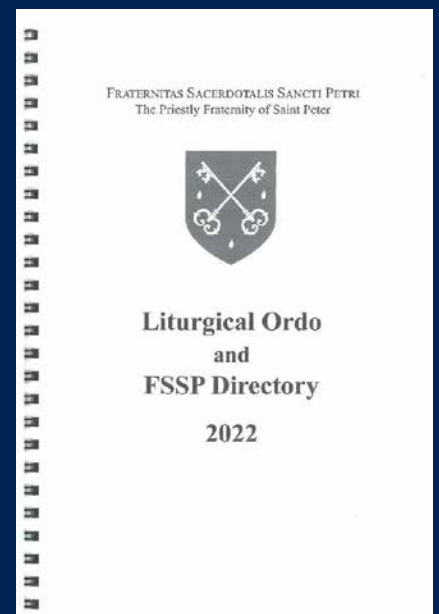
ourselves with the cares and concerns of the things of this world, and they weigh heavily on our souls. Let the thought of the Christ-child this Christmas be for us a profound lesson in humility, this virtue by which our souls are disposed to the grace and influence of the grace and sanctifying inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Christ seeks to reach out to our souls even from the stable: let us contemplate His example, and make this Christmas not just a time of celebration or sentiment, but an occasion of spiritual conversion. ✝



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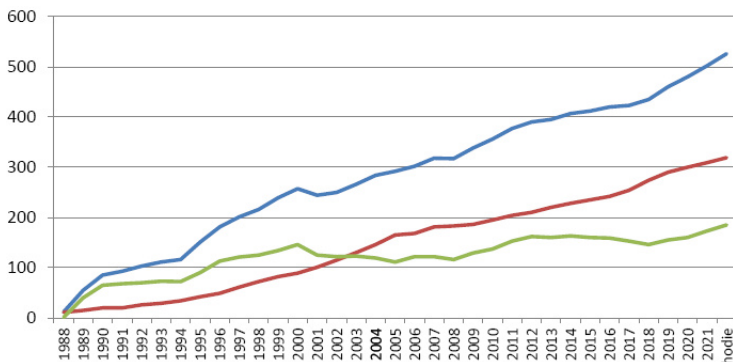


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## Latest FSSP Statistics Show Increase & Continued Growth

The latest FSSP statistics are out and they show an increase in growth over the last 5 years amidst 33 years of steady growth (see the graph below):



Legend: blue = total members, red = definitely incorporated priests, green = seminarians, including deacons.

The Fraternity now has 526 members, including 341 priests, 17 deacons, and 168 non-deacon seminarians. We serve at 259 Mass locations worldwide, in 147 dioceses.

See the full report at :

<https://www.fssp.org/en/presentation-2/figures>



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<https://fssp.com/christmas-day/>

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