

**Homily for the Mass celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
Immaculate Conception Church, Shelbyville**

**August 17, 2025**

**†Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

As your Bishop, it is good to be with you to celebrate this Mass together as we commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Dedication of Immaculate Conception Church here in Shelbyville.

In June of 1999, Immaculate Conception Parish broke ground on their third church building on farmland north of Shelbyville, purchased by the parish in 1972 with the foresight of future expansion. Parishioners raised a portion of the \$1.6 million needed to complete the church through pledges, memorials and fundraisers during a campaign called “Bringing Dreams to Conception.”

After years of planning, fundraising, and prayer, the dreams of the parishioners came to fruition on August 20, 2000, when the Most Reverend George Lucas, Bishop of Springfield in Illinois, dedicated this church. Having been ordained Bishop just a few months earlier on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1999, this was the first church dedication by Bishop Lucas. The Master of

Ceremonies for the Mass was the Diocese's most recently ordained priest, Father Peter Harman.

According to a newspaper account of that event,<sup>1</sup> Father John Sohm and Springfield Dominican Sister Marie Trotter, O.P., welcomed over 350 invited guests to the 2:00 p.m. Mass and Rite of Dedication. Concelebrating the Mass with Bishop Lucas were over twenty priests from the Springfield Diocese along with Father Carl Trotter, cousin to Sister Marie from Louisiana. Nearly twenty-five religious sisters from the Springfield Dominican community came to show their support.

I am grateful to all the priests, religious, and lay staff members who served Immaculate Conception Parish over the years, especially Father Don Woolford, who served as Pastor from 2003 to 2016, and your current Pastor, Father Paweł Augustyniak, who has served as your parish priest for the past six years. The devoted ministry of so many people have made the proclamation of the Gospel possible here not only in this church building over the past twenty-five years, but here in the Catholic community of Shelbyville for over one hundred and seventy-five years!

Today's Gospel passage from Saint Luke (Luke 12:49-53) is somewhat unsettling, even shocking, for it begins with Jesus declaring that he has come

to set the earth on fire, and how he wishes it were already blazing! Jesus' message is one usually associated with peace. From the angels who appeared in the sky at His birth, declaring peace on earth and goodwill to all, to His own words to His disciples - "peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you" - peace is a recurring theme throughout Jesus' ministry. Yet here in Luke's Gospel, we have words of Jesus that make for very uncomfortable reading. They suggest that Jesus will instead be an inspirer of conflict, setting family against family, and that, rather than peace, he stands for division. But note how this Gospel begins: "I came to cast fire to the earth." This is not someone, saying "carry on as before." This is someone warning his followers: "Things must change around here. I have come to make a difference, not continue with the status quo."

For Christians raised in Christian families in an at least nominally Christian society, this passage may seem jarring. But in our increasingly secular society that often displays hostility to the Christian faith, being a Christian means having the courage to stand up for your beliefs, even if that means causing a split with your family. Sadly, many of us, perhaps most of us, have family members and friends who do not practice the Catholic faith and may even oppose us when we stand up for our religious beliefs.

We might at times feel like the prophet Jeremiah in today's first reading (Jeremiah 38: 4-6, 8-10) who is accused of demoralizing people because he spoke the truth. For this, he is cast into a cistern where they expected him to die. Fortunately, one court official has the moral strength to speak the truth to the weak King Zedekiah, pleading for Jeremiah's life to be spared, and so the King orders three men to go with the court official to draw Jeremiah out of the cistern before he would die.

Jesus' words in today's Gospel must have shaken his followers out of any complacency they had. For us, they can do the same. It is all too easy to think that all is well since we have been baptized, we have been raised as Catholics, we go to Mass, and we are doing our bit as Christians. But baptism is not simply a joyful occasion, celebrated on our behalf by our parents and godparents when we were babies, or the reason for a party if we are baptized when we are older. It marks the moment when we enter into following Christ - and his baptism led to the completion of his ministry - to his resurrection, but via the cross. The Christian vocation is one of service and sacrifice, however joyful it is, because of the graces given to us through baptism and following Jesus' way.

Just as the accounts of Jesus' ministry are dotted with references to peace, they also make it clear that His values are not the values of the world. This is not someone talking about having a quiet life when He refers to peace, but something very different – a peace that the world cannot give. A peace that comes from fulfilling God's mission. Yet He understands the courage that fulfilling this mission will require, constantly reassuring His disciples not to be afraid, not to let their hearts be troubled. Instead, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus, as the reading from the Hebrews tells us, to not lose sight of Him as we keep running the race we have started: in other words, our own discipleship.

Of course, this discipleship is not something that is a solitary pursuit. Jesus' followers were a band of brothers, a group that shared their belief in Him. In our own discipleship we can bolster our courage if we have others alongside us. That is why a Christian community like you have here at Immaculate Conception Parish is so important, because together you can accomplish so much more on the road to salvation with the help of God's grace than you ever could do alone. May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> "Immaculate Conception Dedicates New Church," *Shelbyville Daily Union*, August 21, 2000.