

**Homily for the Mass Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the
Founding of Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish**

July 20, 2025

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, deacon, 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 one hundredth anniversary of the founding of Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish here in Decatur.

The Annual Parish Report for Saint Thomas Parish for the year ending December 31, 1925, was signed by the parish's first pastor, Reverend Andrew Smith, a native of Ireland. In the section of the report with the heading, "Historical Data," Father Smith's handwritten notes provide the basic information. He wrote, "St. Thomas Parish was established Jan. 26th, 1925, by the Rt. Rev. James A. Griffin. The site is in 2100 block N. Edward St. A temporary church was erected in April. The cornerstone laying of the permanent church took place August 30th. The address was given by the Rev. M.A. Tarrent." Just the previous year, in 1924, Father Tarrent was named the founding pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish in Springfield.

Here are some interesting statistics from that first Annual Parish Report for St. Thomas the Apostle Parish:

- Number of families in the parish: 120
- Total number of souls under the pastor's care: 600
- Number of converts: 3 men and 5 women, for a total of 8 converts
- Number of marriages: 12
- Number of baptisms: 35 infants and 8 adults, for a total of 43
- Number of First Holy Communions: 50 children and 8 adults, for a total of 58
- Catechism was taught at 2:30 PM on Sundays with 80 in attending.
- There were 4 deaths in that first year.
- There were 3 societies: Holy Name, Young Ladies, and Altar Society
- Total ordinary revenue was \$3,488.90; total expenses: \$1,840.88.
- A mortgage of \$70,000 for the new church was taken out with a down payment of \$54,050 paid on December 31, 1925.

The section for historical data in the 1926 report, also handwritten by the first Pastor, Father Andrew Smith, said, "St. Thomas Church was dedicated September 5th, 1926. Pontifical High Mass. Rt. Rev. James A.

Griffin, D.D. The Knights of Columbus marched in a body from the KofC hall to the new church. ... Dedication ceremonies were elaborate and inspiring. The Rt. Rev. Bishop thrilled the large audience with his eloquent sermon on the Catholic Church."

Well, we have Knights of Columbus here today, the crozier (Bishop's pastoral staff) that I am using today belonged to Bishop Griffin and he may well have used it at Saint Thomas Parish, and I hope you will be "thrilled" with my homily, too!

St. Thomas School opened September 7, 1926, with four Ursuline sisters in charge and 185 students.

Pastors of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish over these past 100 years have included Fr. Andrew Smith, Fr. Thomas P. Masterson, Fr. Terence Tracey, Fr. Robert N. Porter, Fr. Dennis Kollross, Fr. James O'Shea, Fr. Rick Weltin, Fr. Michael Friedel, and now Father Jason Stone. We are grateful to these priests for their dedicated ministry in providing for the pastoral care of St. Thomas Parish.

When Bishop Griffin suggested the church be named after an apostle, Father Smith chose St. Thomas, so it is fitting that we celebrate the Mass for the Feast Day of St. Thomas the Apostle, normally celebrated on July 3rd

every year. As permitted by the *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar* (n. 58), I have approved transferring the liturgical observance of the solemnity of the parish's patronal day to our centennial celebration today.

As someone myself named Thomas, I am very interested in the relationship between Saint Thomas and Jesus. Saint Thomas is featured prominently in today's Gospel (Jn 20:24-29). The conversation between Thomas and Jesus has led to this apostle being referred to for centuries as "Doubting Thomas" with a negative connotation. We often view doubt as a lack of faith and trust—or a character flaw that needs to be overcome or eliminated. However, is it possible that he was not doubting as much as simply asking for an assurance and confirmation of faith—as many of us do throughout our faith journey?

Thomas' desire for living proof does not undermine his great unfaltering love, loyalty, and commitment to Jesus. When Jesus' life is in danger, it is Thomas who proclaims, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (Jn 11:16). His faithfulness to Jesus is not in doubt. It is simply that Thomas has not experienced Jesus as the living Christ, with transcendent abilities that he was yet to witness.

Thomas' doubt led to a very personal and intimate encounter with Christ, one that he may not have had otherwise. In turn, Christ openly reveals Himself to Thomas without judgment or criticism but with loving encouragement that he should "not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answers with his profession of faith that many of us say quietly to ourselves when the consecrated host is elevated before our eyes, "My Lord and my God!"

Notice that Thomas not only comes to see that that Jesus indeed is alive, but puts his faith in Jesus as his Lord and God. Jesus then says to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Our second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians tells us that we are members of the household of God, a wonderful place where we are united with the holy ones, including the apostles and prophets. Jesus Christ is the head of this household, and we can be assured that here God's love and the Lord's teachings guide all actions and endeavors. Without having actually seen God's household, however, we can feel like Thomas: I won't believe until I actually see what it is you're talking about! Let me see what it is like to be a member of this household of God; let me know with my physical senses. Our human nature compels us to want to see, to hear, to

taste, and to touch—not cling to an idea or image of our faith. Yet that is what Jesus asks of Thomas and of us: to believe even though we have not seen. This intimate sense of knowing brings us to a place of faith in what we cannot see but believe to be true.

As Thomas shows us, doubt can play a highly important role in our faith journey. It is the birthplace of affirmed faith and transformation, able to lead us to new, deeper, and more intimate experiences with the living Christ in our lives. Then we, too, will exclaim, “My Lord and my God!”

May God give us this grace. Amen.