

**Homily for the Mass celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Michael the Archangel Parish and 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Michael the Archangel Church, Staunton, Illinois**

**September 20, 2025**

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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 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Saint Michael the Archangel Parish and the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Saint Michael the Archangel Church here in Staunton, Illinois. It is not often that a parish is able to celebrate two significant events at once, but that is exactly what is happening here this evening!

The history of St. Michael Parish dates back to a time when the first Catholics settled in Staunton and built the very first St. Michael Church in 1867, initially as a mission church served by priests from Edwardsville and Raymond. The first resident pastor was Father August Zurbonsen.

Fueled by the expansion of the coal mining industry, the population of Staunton began growing at a rapid pace. Newcomers came from older mining areas of the United States as well as from many countries in Europe. Because of the large number of immigrant parishioners, St. Michael became

a bilingual parish. For many years prayers and homilies were spoken in German at one Mass, while English was used at another

By 1917 or 1918, the old St. Michael Church building was no longer safe, and the building was torn down. The school hall was converted for church services, but that created a lack of space for school and church events. Father Patrick Masterson – who served the parish from 1924 to 1952 – was assigned to the parish with his bishop’s directive to build a new church.

Father Masterson was able to raise \$50,000 for the new building and on Nov. 11, 1925, Bishop James A. Griffin dedicated the new church. The St. Michael parishioners were delighted to worship in the beautiful space. Of course, it wasn’t long before the Great Depression took over the country. However, despite the hardships placed on the parishioners, St. Michael retired its parish debt in 1942.

I am grateful to all the priests, religious, and lay staff members who served St. Michael the Archangel Parish here in Staunton. Over the years, more than 10 pastors have served at St. Michael the Archangel Parish. In February of this year, Father George Radosevich, who served the parish for 36 years before moving to senior priest status, passed away at age 90. Father

Radosevich was a beloved and dedicated pastor who oversaw many changes to parish, including adding a side vestibule to the church (which included a wheelchair lift) in 1989, and restoring a statue of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and constructing a new grotto to house the statue in 2001. In his later years he oversaw a church restoration in 2017, a stained-glass restoration in 2020, and completion of a bell tower and masonry work, also in 2020. For the last four years, Father Thomas Hagstrom has done a fine job of filling the big shoes of Father Radosevich.

The devoted ministry of so many people has made the proclamation of the Gospel possible here in this Parish over the past one hundred and fifty years and this church building over the past one hundred years here in the Catholic community of Staunton!

Today's Gospel passage from Saint Luke (Luke 16:1-13) is the parable of the dishonest steward. A steward was similar to what today we would call a "business manager." The steward worked for an absentee landlord and had significant power in dealing with the landlord's financial affairs. A landlord's worse nightmare would be to discover that his steward has been squandering the landlord's property. That is exactly what happens in today's parable. We are not told how the landlord found out that his steward

was squandering his property. Nevertheless, the landlord called for an immediate financial audit and indicated that the steward was going to be fired.

The steward wastes no time lamenting his situation. Instead he musters up all his ingenuity and quickly devises a plan that will put him in good stead with the landlord's clients after he has been fired by the landlord. The steward calls in all the landlord's debtors and systematically slashes their debt by significant amounts. Some commentators think that the steward slashed the interest due the landlord. Because taking interest on a loan was forbidden for a Jew, this only complicates the situation.

Instead of being angry with the steward for the way he creatively provided for his own future, the landlord praises him for acting so prudently. A series of sayings attached to the parable stress the use of wealth for advancing God's purposes. Commentators say that the point of this parable is to commend the steward's method but not his solution, with Jesus telling His disciples to be resourceful when proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom of God, making good use of material possessions to advance fidelity to God.

Jesus' words in today's Gospel were intended to shake 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, which brings joy because of the graces given to us through baptism and following Jesus' way.

Of course, 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 St. Michael the Archangel 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.