

**HOMILY FOR THE MASS OF THE DEDICATION OF A CHURCH AND ALTAR  
ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE CATHOLIC CHURCH, NEWTON, ILLINOIS**

**Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois  
July 18, 2010**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good to be with you for this dedication of the new church and altar of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish here in Newton.

It is very fitting that I, Thomas John Paprocki, celebrate my very first dedication of a new church in the Diocese of Springfield for a church dedicated to St. Thomas the Apostle. Although I have a special devotion to St. Thomas More, on whose feast day of June 22<sup>nd</sup> together with St. John Fisher I was installed as your new bishop just last month, in a sense all of us named Thomas trace our saintly patronage back to St. Thomas the Apostle.

It has always seemed to me that St. Thomas the Apostle has been somewhat under-appreciated because of his experience as a doubter. Too often we expect saints to be perfect, yet sainthood does not emerge from living an unblemished life, which no person has ever done expect for Jesus and His Blessed Mother, but from cooperating with God's grace to overcome our sins. St. Augustine comes to mind, for example. Yes, Thomas

doubted, but Christ personally presented him with an opportunity to overcome his doubts, which Thomas readily accepted. Who among us has never experienced some doubt, never wondered if the bread really becomes the Body of Christ or if the wine becomes His Precious Blood? Yet it is precisely from someone like St. Thomas the Apostle that we draw inspiration and strength to face and overcoming our doubts, proclaiming with St. Thomas every time we look upon the consecrated Host that Jesus Christ is indeed, "My Lord and my God." May all those who worship here in this new church find their faith strengthened through the intercession of your patron, St. Thomas the Apostle.

As I look back at places that have been important to me in my lifetime, I notice something very unusual. The house that I grew up in was an apartment building where our whole family lived above our family pharmacy. When I say "our whole family," that would be my Mom, Dad, six brothers and two sisters. It was a stately-looking building, at least from the outside. It was built in 1917 with a façade of heavy granite stone on the two sides of the building that faced the main street and the side street of the corner where our drug store stood. Unfortunately, the other two sides of the building, the one adjacent to the next door building and the side

facing the back alley, were built with regular red-face brick. I say, “unfortunately” because the two sides with the heavy granite façade over the years gradually pulled the building down towards those two sides, which were much heavier than the other two sides with the lighter brick. Some of the granite stone eventually fell off the top of the building. No one was hurt, but it would have been too expensive to repair and so the whole building was torn down in 1979.

Another memorable building in which I spent a lot of time in my youth was the old Chicago Stadium. I remember my Dad taking me as a young boy along with Mom and my older brother and sister and climbing up the stairs to the second balcony to watch the Chicago Blackhawks play hockey. What a historic building, and to this day I still “remember the roar” of the crowd. Unfortunately, Chicago stadium was demolished in 1995 after the United Center was built across the street.

Then, of course, there is that other sports shrine where I was frequently in attendance over the years since my youth, Comiskey Park. It was demolished in 1991 and was replaced by a new ball park.

The college seminary that I attended was known as Niles College of Loyola University, located in the Village of Niles, Illinois. In 1995, the

Archdiocese moved the college to Loyola's Lake Shore Campus, selling the old facilities to a developer who tore down all the buildings and replaced them with condominiums.

Are you starting to see a pattern here?

One implication from all this might be that you're feeling a little shaky about the future of this building right about now! But I do assure you that not *every* building that I've frequented in my life has been torn down or crumbled to the ground! In fact the church of my home parish, St. Casimir Church, where I was baptized and confirmed, made my First Confession, received my First Communion, and celebrated my First Mass as a priest and as a bishop, is still standing and looking quite grand. So my string of bad luck doesn't seem to affect church building!

My point in telling you about these demolished buildings is simply to serve as a reminder that everything in this world will eventually pass away, even this beautiful new church that we dedicating today. I don't say that to put a damper on our festivities or on your well-deserved sense of accomplishment, but to keep our liturgy in perspective. Every Eucharist is a foretaste of heaven, and a beautiful new worship space such as this one helps us to imagine the delight of sharing in the heavenly banquet

someday in the splendor of God's kingdom. But let's not lose our focus on that prize. We don't want to be like the traveler who was so enamored with the pleasant sights along the way that he forgot where he was going.

Our scripture readings today help us to keep that focus. The first reading that we heard was from the Old Testament Book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a man of action who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem after the Jews were released from captivity in Babylon and returned to their homeland. The other person named in this reading was the priest Ezra, a great religious reformer. Together, Ezra and Nehemiah rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. But the passage we have today is not about the rebuilding of the city walls or the temple, but the restoration of God's law as the constitution of the returned community. In the same way, our cause for rejoicing today is not ultimately in this building itself, but in the fact that this new church will help us to find the law of God's love in our hearts.

Similarly, St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians reminds us that *we* are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. When St. Paul says that the whole structure is held together through Christ, he is referring to the sacred edifice that together we as a community of faith constitute as a temple sacred in the Lord.

Jesus also makes it clear in today's passage from the Gospel of St. John that the place of true worship of God is not on a mountain or in the temple, He says that true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth.

My friends, I pray that this new church will bring you many blessings, graces and consolations as you take part in the Eucharist here, receive the sacraments, and pray for your loved ones when they die.

As you may already know, it has become customary for me to sing a song in my homily on special occasions, and the dedication of a new church is about as special as you can get in the lifetime of a church building, so I would like to leave you with a song that is really a prayer from one of my favorite singers, Bruce Springsteen. The song is called "Into the Fire," which Bruce Springsteen wrote shortly after 9-11-2001 as a tribute to the firefighters and other rescue workers who literally went up into the fire trying to save others and sacrificing their own lives in the process. It is a prayer for God's strength and for the theological virtues of faith, hope and love, which I pray God will give you through your worship in this new church.

May your strength give us strength,

May your faith give us faith,

May your hope give us hope,

May your love give us love.

Amen.