



St. Thomas Church: established July 1, 1285 by King Vaclav II

**Today's Prayer**

Say this Prayer Today:

The more we call on the Lord  
the more we can feel His Presence.  
Day by day He draws us closer  
to His loving heart.



January 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> 2014

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary time A

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# St. Thomas Church

## **"The Kingdom is at hand" (CCC 541-542)**

When Jesus began his ministry, the Kingdom was truly at hand, for he embodied God's reign. By preaching the Good News and healing those in need, Jesus revealed God in the midst of his people. By gathering followers, Jesus called together God's people, his Church, so people could be close to the Father.

*Who has led you closer to Christ? How has that person been a light in your life?*

In Jesus' time, people sought wisdom, a light to guide their lives. They were so eager for wisdom, any new idea that came with traders from the East or South was easily accepted. We, too, live in a world eager for wisdom with many different mediums to inform us. We all look for "lights" to our way.

Jesus was a light in his message, his ministry, and his call. He revealed God to others. As his followers, we are to carry that message, ministry, and call forward.

*How have you used wisdom to help you to live a*

The traditional date for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25 January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul Wattson to cover the days between the feast of St Peter and the feast of St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic meaning. In the southern hemisphere where January is a vacation time churches often find other days to celebrate the week of prayer, for example around Pentecost (which was suggested by the Faith and Order movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the Church.

We belong to Christ. We are his and no other's. This fact is the foundation for our unity: In baptism, Christ has claimed us for his own, and made us all one in him. The unity we share in Christ is greater than all the differences, past and present, which divide the churches today.

Because we belong to Christ, we belong to one another and are accountable to one another. That is why Christ calls us to build up his body, the church, together as co-workers and fellow-servants. That is why Christians and churches are called to live and work together, as fellow-servants in witnessing to their faith and in serving those in need. And that is why divisions, dissension, quarrelling, factions based on personalities (even if they are Paul or Apollos or Cephas) – all these are denials not only of our brothers and sisters in Christ, but of Christ himself.

As God's temple, the church is a place of worship, and common worship is the most powerful expression of our common belonging to Christ. Every act of common worship is a victory over our division and a celebration of the unity which we do have in Christ. We are united with all those, in all places and times, who have belonged to Christ and who in the Spirit have worshipped God. We do not always act, of course, in accordance with the unity given us in Christ. When we cannot worship together, especially at the Lord's table, our disunity is plain for all to see. Here there is more "building" to be done – and that by all churches!

**Coffee, Cookies & Conversation** follow Sunday Mass in the Monastery Refectory off the Cloister Garden. **All are invited, especially our visitors.** Please contact, Fr. William Faix if you want to add announcements to the bulletin at wfaix@yahoo.com

## The Status of Marriage

This reading is in support of the call of our Holy Father, Pope Francis for a Synod regarding family issues. It is an attempt to bring to light the current pressures and realities of the world we live in. It is not a discussion to pass judgment but rather to highlight the issues, which will be discussed during the upcoming Synod.

Why the special attention to the family? Pope Francis is well known for his efforts to reach out to the poor; why not a Synod on poverty? Why not a gathering of the Bishops to discuss the role of women in the church? Why has he selected family as the topic for such a gathering?

I traveled a few months back to the United States. During that time, I had some opportunity to watch television. I am always fascinated by the commercials. They are in some way a reflection on society. During the time I was there, I started to notice a pattern. I did not observe one commercial that represented a complete and stable family unit: one with a Mother, a Father and one or more children.

If there is one thing I know, it is that our advertisers have good statistical models, and they are trying to establish a relationship with the customer. By representing the circumstances their perspective customer was experiencing, they were establishing this connection. In other words, the commercials we see are a reflection of society.

I started to look for statistics. The best material for statistics is from the United States, so please forgive that this is slightly culturally biased. I was able to find stats on the Czech Republic and the EU, but rarely did the statistics match up exactly.

As of December 2011, just 51% of all American adults were married and 28% never had been, down from 72% and up from 15% in 1960. The American divorce rate is nearly twice what it was in 1960, though it has declined somewhat since hitting an all-time high in 1980.

The number of cohabitating couples increased by a factor of 17 (The State of our Unions 2001, 75), from 1960-2010, and a full 68% of marriages during the years 1997-2001 began as cohabitation (National Health Statistics Report, 2012). The disturbing fact is that these unions have a 46% greater risk of divorce than those who have not lived together before matrimony (Marriage and the Family in the United States: Resources for Society, 10).

In the Czech Republic, under the socialistic system, the trend in the 80s, was to get married at 18 or shortly after and have children right away. This entitled the new couple to a state sponsored apartment, a spot in the cue for a car and other benefits. Today's statistics show that the average age for Czech marriage is 30 (31 for men and 29 for women).

In 1999 after implementation of new legislation the divorce rate rose to 41% in 2000 and even 45% in 2001. This means that more than four out of ten marriages eventually end in divorce (Zeman 20003, Divorce and Marital Dissolution in the Czech Republic and in Austria – The Role of Premarital Cohabitation *Diploma Thesis*)

Cohabitation is even more prevalent in the Czech Republic than in other parts of Europe. The Family and Fertility Study conducted at the end of the 90s showed a full 48.2% of women under the age of 50 were cohabitating. That rate is anticipated to be higher today, although I could not find any hard statistics. What I did find is that the EU estimates a full 40% of the children born in the Czech Republic are born out of wedlock, with the birth of the first child being a motivation for marriage, or the children reaching the age of mandatory schooling, urging parents to exchange vows.

## Ongoing Activities

**Coffee, Cookies & Conversation** follow Sunday Mass in the Monastery Refectory off the Cloister Garden. **All are invited, especially our visitors.**

If you would like to receive a copy of the bulletin by email, please contact [osaprag@augustiniani.cz](mailto:osaprag@augustiniani.cz)

We are looking for a **English teacher** for our parish. More information with Fr. Juan

**Eucharistic Ministers:** There will be a short training session for those who would like to serve the community as a Eucharistic Minister. The session will be on **Sunday, February 16** after mass at **12:15**. The training will be led by Fr. William.

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In the U.S., the EU and the Czech Republic approximately 1 of every two marriages fail.

Psychologist Pavel Raus says there are several critical periods in any marriage that test the strength of the relationship.

*“The first crisis-period comes fairly soon in the marriage when the novelty wears off. At first partners go out of their way to meet each others needs and are extremely selfless in this respect. But in time people revert to some of their less attractive habits and no longer make so much effort on behalf of their partner. This is the period where we have to accept our partners for who they are and respect them but also to feel free to be ourselves.”*

According to statistics, many Czech marriages never make it past this point. The most divorces happen between the second and fifth year of the marriage. For those who do make it there are other hurdles to cross – accommodating to big changes, financial problems, health problems, mid-life crisis and not least the oft cited “empty nest” syndrome. Petr Cincala says that while in the past, when divorce was not considered an option, people found the strength to overcome these problems today married couples often part over the first serious discord.

*“In the past people felt and enormous responsibility to make their marriage work, and there was a great deal of social pressure on them to do so. They often stayed together against all the odds because they felt it was their duty to do so and that it was best for their children. They got married for better or for worse and many did not even consider divorce as a possibility. Today people perceive marriage very differently: it must bring them satisfaction.....People’s attitude to marriage has definitely changed.”*

<http://www.radio.cz/en/section/panorama/czechs-celebrate-7th-annual-marriage-week-but-marriage-rate-still-falling>)

Next week... How does this affect our Children and the Church?

God Bless