

## *Ministry Spotlight: Fr. Craig Irwin, OSFS*

**Can you tell us a bit about your path to the Priesthood? When did you feel the call? And how has it gone thus far?** I initially felt a call to the Priesthood when I was 17 years old, so in 2001. I was a junior at St. Francis de Sales High School in Toledo, OH, and very involved in the youth ministry program at my home parish, St. Clement. I didn't come to this realization on my own, but rather through various youth ministers and adult volunteers telling me that I had skills and talents that would lend themselves well to being a priest. I mostly brushed these off as mere compliments until a priest who was involved told me the same. It was at that moment that I thought, "Huh... if he's saying this, maybe there is something to it." Soon I was thinking about entering seminary right out of high school, but my parents were not open to that idea, and, looking back, I am grateful that they weren't. It took me eleven years to finally enter the Oblates and begin my formation at age 28, but the experiences I had in that time, as a college student, a lay missionary in Minnesota, and a parish youth minister, were all vital in shaping me into the man and the minister that I am today.

**What are your favorite hobbies?** I enjoy cycling, though I am by no means good at it. However, it is my primary means of exercise in the warmer months, and I love the feeling of freedom that it can bring. I also enjoy baking, a hobby that I have returned to during the pandemic. I used to bake in college, a fun distraction that my roommate and I got into instead of doing homework, but I moved on from it and didn't look back until the spring of 2020. Now, I have created my sourdough starter and love the experience of making my bread instead of buying it from the store.

**What advice do you have for a young person in our parish who is considering a vocation?** I would tell them not to rush it! I have often encountered young people who think they may be called and who then want to jump into the process right away. While this is not bad, and many vocations come about this way, I think there is also something to be said for a longer discernment. Go to college. Get a job. Date people. Don't be afraid to live life. If the Lord is calling you to the priesthood, or religious life, then the call won't go away. It took me eleven years between my initial feeling of being called and my actual entry into formation and all along I still felt the pull, and many of my seminary classmates have similar stories. So don't try to rush it because you are afraid the call will go away if you don't... because of the feeling goes away then it was probably never your call in the first place, and it is better to learn this before you take perpetual vows or are ordained than after.

**Who is your favorite Saint and why?** Other than the Salesian saints, whom I feel like I would be cheating if I picked here, my favorite saint is probably St. Thomas the Apostle, whom I chose as my confirmation saint. In the Gospels, and especially in the Gospel of John, St. Thomas is regularly the human voice speaking the things that other people are probably afraid to say. When, in John 14, Jesus says, "Where I am going, you know the way," Thomas replies with, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" This leads to Jesus saying one of his most meaningful phrases, "I am the way and the truth and the life." So Thomas, by not being afraid to speak up and ask questions, brings about greater clarity and beauty. Finally, there is the scene at the end of John's Gospel where Jesus appears to everyone and Thomas isn't there, so when he hears about it he insists that he will not believe until he touches Jesus' wounds. Thomas regularly gets the name "Doubting Thomas" because of this, but I also feel certain that I would have been right there next to Thomas saying the same thing. And Thomas' action leads to another beautiful statement when Jesus says to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." And that is us, the followers of Jesus 2000 years later! So, even though he sometimes gets a bad rap, St. Thomas the Apostle is probably my favorite Saint.