

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski

January 15, 2023

St. Paul, in today's second reading, reminds the Corinthians that they, "who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, [are] called to be holy." And so have we: Through our baptism, we Christians are called to be holy. This "universal call to holiness" is based on the passage in the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus says, "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:48) Holiness is not just for the ordained and the religious. *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, from Vatican II, refers to our call to holiness, as follows:

...all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love;...[They] should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gifts, so that...[they may do] the will of God in everything...[that they] may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor."(LG,\$40)

Pope St. John Paul II referred to holiness as "the prime and fundamental vocation" that God the Father assigns to each of us. In a nutshell, we're each called to use ALL of our God-given gifts for the glory of God and for the service of our neighbor. That may seem to be a tall order; however, that's where the Communion of Saints can be of help to us.

Those who came before us serve as exemplary role models on our quest for holiness. Although we often think that holiness is beyond our reach, it's worth remembering that all of the saints were ordinary people striving to hear and follow God's will. For example, I invite you to...

Meet Blessed Carlo Acutis, the first millennial saint, who was born into a wealthy Italian family in 1991. Although he was only on this earth for a short time, he wanted to do God's will and help bring all people closer to God.

At the time of Carlo's birth, his mother and father were nominally Catholic, rarely attending Mass. However, they dutifully had Carlo baptized shortly after his birth. When Carlo was five years old, his maternal grandfather died and subsequently appeared to him in a dream asking to be prayed for. From that time on, young Carlo showed a devotion to all things religious, especially the Blessed Mother, whom he would describe as "the only woman in my life." Additionally, he couldn't pass in front of a church without asking to enter and blow kisses to Jesus. Carlo also had a place in his young heart for the weakest, rejected and marginalized. He gave his very self in establishing a relationship with the "rejects" of society. The parish priest, teachers, classmates and all who knew him told his mother, "Your son is special."

Throughout his short life, Carlo showed himself to be a generous, affectionate and brilliant youth. But in early October 2006, at the age of 15, Carlo developed one of the worst and most aggressive forms of leukemia. Carlo, devoted to the Blessed Mother, died on October 12, 2006, on the feast of Our Lady of the Pillar. After the first miracle attributed to his intercession was confirmed, Carlo Acutis was beatified in 2020.

Carlo's life is a road map to how we too can become holy. During his life, he regularly performed five simple steps that we all can follow:

- Frequent Reception of the Eucharist—Carlo's simple prayer after receiving communion reveals how deeply he believed in the divine indwelling of Jesus as a friend: "Jesus, come right in! Make yourself at home!" He believed, as he said, that "The Eucharist is my highway to heaven."
- Eucharistic Adoration—Before and after Mass and whenever otherwise possible, Carlo prayed before Jesus in the tabernacle.
- Spiritual Guide and Regular Confession—He sought out and met frequently with a spiritual guide to whom he could confess regularly. Carlo professed that the path to holiness requires cooperation with the graces that God sends us through the Sacraments.

- Devotion to Our Blessed Mother and the Saints—I've already mentioned his devotion to the Blessed Mother. Additionally, he was especially intrigued by the lives of the saints, but most especially the three shepherd children of Fatima: Lucia, Jacinta and Francesco.
- Charity—To be a saint, Carlo said that we need to love: "A life will be really beautiful if we come to love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves."

In addition to these 5 steps, Carlo left us with one other testament: The Vatican's ***International Exhibition of Eucharistic Miracles of the World***. I failed to mention that Carlo was somewhat of a computer prodigy, impressing even degreed programming professionals. He used his skills to research and develop a website that highlights 1,800 years of Eucharistic miracles, including the miracle stories, scientific study supporting these miracles and the scriptural basis for belief in the Real Presence in the Eucharist. This traveling exhibition will be at 5 parishes in our diocese a week from now, from January 21-25. Refer to the Cathedral's online bulletin, or the handouts at the back of the church, for details.

And finally, this book ***Blessed Carlo Acutis: 5 Steps to Becoming a Saint*** was gifted to all of the priests and deacons of our diocese by Bishop Johnston this past Christmas. It is a very easy and inspirational read. And it moved me to focus this homily on Carlo. If you have any interest in this book, it can be purchased online or in the Cathedral's gift shop.