

[Deut. 8:2-3,14b-16a; Psalm 147; 1 Cor 10:16-17; John 6:51-58]

“Everyone is born as an original, but many people end up dying as photocopies.”

These words were said by Blessed Carlo Acutis, the first millennial to be beatified -- to be named “Blessed” -- at the age of 15. He was laid out and buried in a sweatshirt, jeans, and tennis shoes. He was a computer nerd and a “jock.” He was somewhat popular, but not in the exclusive cliques. His peers came up to him, but Carlo sought out the lonely kids, the bullied kids.

It can seem discouraging at times to see so many young people abandon the faith. Almost 80% of those who abandon the faith do so before the age of 23. Blessed Carlo, who is one step away from being canonized and called St. Carlo Acutis, reminds us that holiness is not something reserved for the elderly, but something that is called to be lived with new vigor in every age. Even today. Especially today.

Part of the way that Carlo lived his path to holiness was recognizing that while we are all born as “originals,” as unique and unrepeatable reflections of God’s marvelous creativity, we often seek to live lives of imitation, seeking to be “photocopies” instead.

When we were teenagers, we connected with a particular celebrity, singer or sports hero. We still look for purpose or meaning in a political movement or a hobby. Instead of becoming more original, we become more like everyone else. Teens, especially, want to fit in, want to be like everybody else. They don’t want to stand out from the crowd. They want to be invited, accepted, and find a safe haven in the group.

But, we soon come to learn that our greatest purpose and meaning is not in the identity that we create and change every other week, as I did in high school. Only in receiving the gift of our deepest identity as God’s adopted sons and daughters can we be truly original and recognize how God desires to shine His light uniquely and specifically in our lives.

Carlo was born into a Catholic family who never went to church. But Carlo sought to live as the “original” that God desired him to be. While he was like his peers in his love for comics, video games and computer programming, the one thing that made him different as a youth growing up in the early 90s was his profound love of the Most Holy Eucharist. The Feast we celebrate today. The Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Carlo's mother admits that, before he was born, she had attended Mass only three times in her life: for her First Communion, her Confirmation, and her Wedding. But we see the graces of Carlo's baptism at work in that although he was born into a non-practicing family, he begged his parents to take him to Mass not only every Sunday, but even daily. Through his example, his own mother came to know the Lord and to live a vibrant life of faith. It is usually parents who are forced to drag their children to Mass. It was the other way around in Carlo's case, since his parents did not go to Mass regularly. In witnessing Carlo's love for the Eucharistic Christ, he led his parents to join him and grow in their relationship with Jesus in the Eucharist. "And a child shall lead them..." Carlos also said, "The Eucharist is the Highway to Heaven."

Through the example of those around him, Carlo first developed a love for the Eucharist as a small child. He would cross himself whenever he passed a church to give reverence to the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

The most significant moment in young Carlo's spiritual life was his First Holy Communion when he was seven years old. He was younger than the other children receiving their First Holy Communion, but his pastor Msgr. Pasquale Macchi, recognized young Carlo's faith and gave his permission for Carlo to receive the sacrament early. Carlo asked for the Mass to take place in a quiet local monastery.

After receiving Jesus for the first time, he went back to his seat and the mother superior of monastery said, "It seemed that something had happened to him, only known to him, something too big that he could not contain."

It was in these moments that Carlo began his own Eucharistic journey on what he would call the "Highway to Heaven." He combined his devotion to the Eucharist and his knowledge of technology to share with others about various Eucharistic miracles throughout history. He researched hundreds of them, and put them on line. He learned how to develop and share the website with others.

Like Carlo, as we grow in our relationship with Jesus in the Eucharist on our own "Highway to Heaven", we are called to bring others along with us on the way. As Jesus did with the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. Remember them?

After the powerful experience of his First Holy Communion, Carlo made a personal resolution to go to Mass every day. He would make the effort to wake up early

and do whatever he needed to do to make it to Mass. In addition to bringing his parents along with him, he frequently invited others to join him as well.

Carlo recognized that the soul who commits to Daily Mass is brought daily closer and closer to Heaven and to the gift of salvation. After receiving Jesus in the Eucharist each day, the simple prayer that Carlo would say was “Jesus, come right in! Make yourself at home!” This humble prayer to Jesus as a close friend shows us the simplicity of Eucharistic faith. Jesus desires to enter our lives and make them more like His own. The practice of Daily Mass might seem daunting but, in most cases, there are Masses throughout the week at our Family of Parishes for you to make it at least once or twice a week. Besides Morning Mass here, we have one every Wednesday at 7:00 PM.

“If we go out in the sun, we get a suntan... But when we get in front of Jesus in the Eucharist, we become saints.”

*Unleash the Gospel* repeated the call of Pope St. John Paul II that each one of us grows in our sense of “Eucharistic amazement.” The gift of Himself that Jesus gives to us in the Eucharist should cultivate a deep sense of amazement.

The gift that God is present should cultivate a sense of wonder in our hearts. For Carlo, that amazement grew through the practice of Eucharistic Adoration. Before or after Mass, Carlo would spend long periods of time adoring Jesus in the Eucharist. He would make a point to attend Eucharistic Adoration two to three times each week to speak simply to Jesus about the desires of his heart.

Prayer does not need to be complicated. Instead, prayer is meant to be radically simple. Our hearts are made for God and God desires to grow in relationship with us through prayer. Eucharistic Adoration provides the circumstance for us to simply rest in His presence, knowing that he is near and attentive to the needs of our hearts. Even when we feel like prayer is difficult, when we are in front of Jesus in the Eucharist, we can be confident that He is near and working to heal our hearts even if we are not aware of it. As one adorer says, “I just sit there. I look at Him, and He looks at me.”

As you create a habit of going to Eucharistic adoration, it is key also to build your capacity for stillness. If you are new to going to Adoration -- or you just want to try something new -- check out these ways to build that habit as you spend time in conversation with Jesus. Start with silence. Write in a journal. Pray with a meditation.

Read the Gospels. Surrender.

Desiring that others might come to know the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament as he did, he created a website cataloguing different Eucharistic miracles, still in existence today. And his love for the Eucharist spilled over to concrete love and care of others, especially of the poor, but also closer to home, of a classmate he knew was struggling with a difficult family situation.

Carlo's life ended at the age of 15. He began to feel sick in October, 2006 with what he thought was the flu; it was instead an aggressive form of leukemia. At the small beginning signs of the illness that would two weeks later take his life, Carlo offered up his life for the Holy Father (at the time, Pope Benedict XVI) and for the Church. After suffering heroically, he fell into a coma, with a smile on his face, from which he never awoke. He was beatified in 2020 -- the first millennial to be thus honored by the Church. In only 15 years, Our Eucharistic Lord had shaped this teenager's heart to be completely conformed to His. Carlo's life revolved around the Blessed Sacrament — Jesus truly present with us, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

What about for you? Is Jesus in the Eucharist the center of your life? Or do other things creep in to take His place? Is everything else in life expendable for you, or do you act sometimes instead as though Mass and the Eucharist were expendable? Does the Eucharist hold the place of just an hour on Sundays for you? Or is Jesus among us in the Eucharist your "Highway," your fast track to Heaven?

Only if we live our lives daily with the Eucharist at the center will we find peace and fulfillment, strength and joy. We must be able to proclaim, *Jesus is everything to me*. Circumstances can change. It is only God-with-us — and on this earth, with us specifically in the Blessed Sacrament — that is constant. May He truly be the center of our lives. May the Eucharist be for us, too, our "Highway to Heaven!" AMEN!

[Readings: Exodus 19:2-6a; Psalm 100; Romans 5:6-11; Matthew 9:36-10:8]

Recently, I came upon this reflection from Father Jonathan D. Kalisch, OP Director of Chaplains and Spiritual Development for the Knights of Columbus. I share this with you as we honor all fathers on this Father's Day weekend.

Every man -- even those who don't have children of their own -- is called to fatherhood. His fatherhood consists of nurturing the vocations of those for whom the Lord has given him care and responsibility. A father plays a key role in showing his children the love of God the Father, through which they experience, on a supernatural level, the knowledge of the unrepeatability of their own unique lives. God shows us a Father's love in our First Reading.

Before a man is ever a spouse or a father, he himself is first a beloved son of God the Father. Knowing that he is a beloved son of the Eternal Father gives a man ordered priority to his life and relationships: first God, then his spouse and, finally, his children.

Over the past several decades, for many reasons, men have been suffering an identity crisis. Whereas in former days, a son would clearly have grasped his father's instruction, "Show yourself a man," today such a curt instruction might not be so readily understood. The messages our culture broadcasts about what it means to be a "real man" are inconsistent and confusing. In movies and on television, images of men vary widely from violent, take-no-prisoner pseudo-superheroes, to smooth-talking, machismo-driven womanizers, to sheepish and vulnerable women-fearers who seem to want to be one of the girls more than one of the guys.

Today, men, in their role as husbands and fathers, are often portrayed in the media as stupid, insensitive to their wives, and the worst possible role model for their children. These and other factors tend to make men feel powerless. Professional sports figures often leave men and boys empty of genuine role models, too.

Rare is the positive image of ordinary, hardworking men who are faithful to God, faithful to the Church, Faithful to their wives, and faithful to their families and friends. Thank you to those men in this parish who are such men. Thank you for your witness.

Within the Church, as well, it is not as easy as it once was for men and boys to find living examples of what it means to be a "man of God." Does man's God-given mission differ from woman's, and if so, how? Are there any role models men can turn to in order to learn how to become the men their Father in heaven calls them to be?

How can men today arm and defend themselves against the cultural phenomena that are weakening their identity and diverting them from their God-given tasks?

Look around at our society today and it's clear that the world needs good fathers. But what does good fatherhood look like? As we celebrate Father's Day, here are some reflections on the important roles that fathers play in the life of their children. The father is a man who provides, who teaches, who establishes, and who intercedes.

#### A provider

The first couple of years of fatherhood is this glorious self-martyrdom of our desires. It changes a man. He stops thinking about his needs and focuses on providing for this new dependent child. A father intentionally and happily gives up his time and desires for the greater good of raising his child.

#### A teacher

As a toddler visibly changes and develops, the role as a father changes and develops, too. A father creates an atmosphere for his child to learn and to thrive. Virtue is formed not by a single good act but by doing the good act habitually. Habits are not easy to form, especially with a child.

Language sets the tone for building a culture "where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule." Teach the importance of good and holy language, the virtues of respect and piety, by starting with this very simple task of using "please," "thank you," "yes ma'am/no ma'am," and "yes sir/no sir." Be sure to say this to your wife as well!

Silence is not a child's natural disposition. Yet, there are many times in a child's life when they need to know when to be quiet. Look for creative ways to cultivate silence in the home. "After dinner tonight, we will have five minutes of quiet playtime," Quietly build spaceships out of Legos together, or I read him his favorite book while he sits silently listening.

### An establisher

As your child comes to the age of reason, establish him, making him a disciple of Christ, so that one day he could go out into the world to spread the Good News.

Establishing a routine of living a sacramental life is the first focus. What do Sundays look like in your house? Does it look like every other day? Or is this day set apart (or sacred) from all the other days? Sundays and holy days of obligation must be filled with joy and rest. Joy is a response when we receive what we love. And at holy Mass, we receive the body, blood, soul and divinity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. As a Catholic, there is no greater reason to celebrate with family and friends. Sundays should not be another day to get more work done; it should be a day of rest and feasting. This naturally establishes traditions within the family and community that can be passed down to future generations.

A father that is more than just a provider of natural necessities and a teacher of natural virtues, but a role model for living a true, authentic Christian life.

### An intercessor

Contrary to what the culture might say, fatherhood does not end once the child leaves the home. While the father's role and influence might change, his role is nevertheless important. He must pray that the child, now a young adult, surrounds themselves with good, holy and virtuous people. So, the lens should be widened to see beyond just the child. The father can no longer afford to be laser-focused on the present but has to have the foresight to be praying for his child's friends, community and even their future spouse.

The fullness of fatherhood is reached when a man becomes a grandfather. As the young father matures from the natural concerns of the baby, to teaching morality to the child, to interceding for the child as a young adult and starting his own family, he arrives at a unique spot in grand-fatherhood.

The son he has established has gone out into the world and has now come back to share his life with his father. Comically, he has even started making some of the same jokes or using the same sayings as his father. His son,

after spending time and seeing how a man should act, has become more and more like his father. The grandfather sees the family he and his wife have created and knows that it is good. With his mortality ever present, he is less concerned about the busyness of the day-to-day but has a unique perspective on what should be of most importance. And with this vision, he wants to guard and preserve the good things he has established in this life.

A grandfather, alongside a grandmother, would take a moment to address the family when they got together for holidays or birthday celebrations. He would express the love he has for his wife and his children and share words of wisdom. "You can never go wrong with doing what is right." Spend time together." "Support one another." "Live a life of prayer." "Make sure to pass on the Faith to the next generation."

As fatherhood requires us to make certain sacrifices, likewise, so does entering into a life of prayer. We must change our daily routines and give up selfish desires for the greatest good, namely, developing a relationship with Jesus Christ. Spending time with Christ every day will not only change how we view the world but how we view ourselves. He slowly reveals to us our true selves, bringing to light imperfections that may have been hidden and reminding us of the constant need for conversion. It is in prayer that he will not only teach us how to talk but when to talk.

To be a truly good Christian father, you must be a man of prayer. It is a necessary requisite to the vocation. The goal of a Christian father is to raise saints, and by his grace, one day on your deathbed, your children will express their gratitude that their father's love gave them a glimpse of the Father's love.

AMEN!



Readings: Jer. 20:10-13; Psalm 69; Rom. 5:12-15; Matt. 10:26-33]

“I hear the whispering of many.” Gossip and fear are two actions that are not part of a true Christian’s character and integrity. I saw a cocktail napkin that says, “I don’t repeat gossip, so pay attention the first time.”

What is the local grapevine saying about you that troubles you? How does it affect your ability to do your job well? How do you deal with gossip at work, at school, at the game, and I dare say, here in the church parking lot or even in this very worship space? “Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed.” Do you have secrets about yourself? How do these connect with your fears? What would be likely to happen if your deepest, darkest secrets were made public?

All of us have suffered to some degree the personal agony of having someone lessen our good name, or blacken our reputation by spreading false reports about us, or by misinterpreting our actions, or by twisting the meaning of our words or by misjudging our intentions and emotions.

Few things, if any, are more precious to someone than his or her good name and good health. And yet, if we have suffered from having our good name damaged, we probably have done our own fair share of lessening other people’s good names as well – sometimes unknowingly, sometimes intentionally, and sometimes perhaps even maliciously. Even if the information is true.

This is a form of “bearing false witness,” as forbidden by the Eighth Commandment. It may also be a kind of verbal or psychic murder that’s forbidden by the Fifth Commandment. “Thou shalt not kill.”

We kill the good name and reputation of someone with false reports, false interpretations, or simply by passing along juicy and malicious gossip. Even if the information is true, it is called slander. Libel if it is in written form. If the information is false, it is called calumny. All three are deadly – to you and to your victim. The damage done cannot be revoked, much like trying to put back into a torn pillow its feathers once the pillow is shaken in the wind.

What is the motive for spreading such bad news? Is it jealousy, self-righteousness, the hurt inflicted upon us by another, our desire to appear more important than others because “I have news?” We need to ask ourselves three questions: Is it true – is it from a reliable source? Is it necessary to tell – or is better left unshared? And is it kind? -- Do I speak with charity and kindness?

E. Paul Hovey says that sin has four characteristics: "self-sufficiency instead of faith, self-will instead of submission, self-seeking instead of benevolence, self-righteousness instead of humility." Maybe that's why we sin.

So what do we do with this? Where do we go? We take consolation in the words of Jeremiah: “But the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion.” Our hope is that not only will the Lord restore our good name, if tarnished, but that the Lord will punish those who knowingly and maliciously have tried to hurt us.

Finally, Jesus tells us in the Gospel today that we shouldn't really worry about those who try to harm us, unless they also have the power to stifle the life of grace within us or can force us to deny Jesus. In short, safeguard the good name of others, and God will safeguard yours.

Jesus says, “Do not be afraid.” Fear imprisons, faith liberates; fear paralyzes, faith empowers; fear disheartens, faith encourages; fear sickens, faith heals.” “You are worth more.” Than fear.

Jesus not only says, “Fear no one,” but elsewhere he declares, “Fear is useless” (Luke 8:50, 1970 NAB translation). To which He adds the important phrase: “What is needed is faith.”

Will the anxieties of this present season be enough to kill our souls, to rob us of the capacity for compassion or empathy? Will fear triumph over virtues like love, kindness, generosity, and biblical hospitality to the marginalized? If what is needed is faith, then, O Lord, increase our faith! And diminish our fears! AMEN!