

[Wisdom 9:13-18b, Psalm 90; Philemon 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14:25-33]

Today, the Roman Catholic Church rejoices as Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis are officially declared saints — two young disciples, chosen by God for our era, who show us that holiness is not only possible but contagious.

Pier Giorgio Frassati, called by Saint John Paul II “The Man of the Beatitudes,” was born April 6, 1901. An Italian layman and Catholic activist, who was known for his deep faith, love for the poor, social action and joy-filled spirit.

As a college student and avid mountain climber, he devoted his life to prayer, service, and friendship. He died after a brief illness on July 4, 1925 and was beatified in 1990. He inspires young adults 18 to 35 to live boldly for Christ with joy and generosity. His motto was “Verso L ’Alto” – “Toward the Heights!” Or, “Reach for the TOP!”

Carlo Acutis, our first Millennial Saint, was born May 3, 1991. An Italian teen whose love for the Eucharist and skill with technology led him to create a website cataloging Eucharistic miracles -- earning him the nickname "God's influencer." Diagnosed with leukemia at 15, he offered his sufferings for the Pope (Benedict XVI) and for the Church, living a heroic yet ordinary life of faith. He died on October 12, 2006 and was beatified in 2020. He is the patron saint of teens.

These are not distant figures from centuries past -- Pier Giorgio and Carlo walked streets like ours, faced struggles like ours, and yet gave everything for Christ.

Their canonization, or official declaration of sainthood, is a prophetic sign for today's Church: God is raising up a generation of saints, and He's calling our young people to be next.

Canonization is not simply an honor; it is the Church's joyful proclamation that these brothers in Christ now live forever with God and intercede for us. Saints are witnesses to Christ's love, showing us what it looks like to say "yes" to Him with our lives.

In this Jubilee Year of Hope, the canonization of Pier Giorgio and Carlo reminds us that holiness is not an exception — it is our calling. Each one of us here is called to grow in holiness. These two young saints speak powerfully into the heart of this generation:

- In a world saturated with digital noise, Carlo shows us that the Internet can be used to learn about the faith and that the Eucharist is our "Highway to Heaven."
- In a culture that longs for meaning, Pier Giorgio shows us that true happiness comes from laying down our lives in love and service.

This moment is a beacon of hope for the Church, especially for young people. It proclaims that sainthood isn't a relic of the past -- it's alive, attainable, and unfolding right now. For you and for me!

Do you have what it takes to be a saint, a disciple? Don't panic: You don't have to "hate" your family. Remember what I said a couple of weeks ago: The word "hate" which Jesus uses in the context of this Gospel translates as "to love less." Here is how to do it in four ways. With God, with our relationships with others, with our possessions, and with ourselves.

Our first priority, requiring our greatest love and attention: God. How do we get to God? Through listening to His Word and following His commandments and teachings. By making time and giving the effort to get to know Him, to fall in love with Him and to serve Him.”

Second priority: your relationships. Love those you love, LESS than you love God. Frankly, it’s awkward no matter when we read this teaching. I mean, how many of us really hate our families? (I’m NOT going to ask for a show of hands!) Sure, certain family members get on our nerves occasionally. We have falling-outs from time to time for all sorts of reasons: political or religious differences, lifestyle choices, insensitive remarks made in the heat of an argument, as well as real injuries suffered at the hands of those who can hurt us deeply because we loved and trusted them the most.

But even when a spouse, parent, sibling, child, or other relative disappoints us terribly, the majority of the time, we still don’t find it in our hearts to hate them. Something in us still yearns to be reconciled and reconnected with them.

There is no peace until the mending of bridges starts and the healing has a chance to begin. Even if it isn’t possible to receive that person back into our lives again, we know we need at least the balm of divine forgiveness to close the wound that remains between them and us. Because, at the end of the day, no matter what that other person did or failed to do, we’re still family, and that is the strongest bond in the world.

Third priority: your material and financial possessions. That means being ready to “renounce” your possessions. In classic spiritual language, it is called, “detachment.” You put your material

possessions in proper priority. Remember: we LOVE people and we USE things, we do not use people and love things. That's wrong.

Fourth priority: you! It's been said that when we find out who we are, we learn what we are called to be.

So, we discover that in taking care of ourselves, in reaching out to our families and to those in need, and putting all of our financial and material possessions at the service of the Lord, we learn that God is there the whole time. Love God, love others, and love yourself. God is in the other.

Your questions for this week to reflect upon:

When have you felt the most unsure of the next best step?
Have you ever felt confident that God's wisdom set you straight?

Who are the modern-day Pauls in your life -- disciples that through example and some urging help you to do the right thing?

What relationships -- to people or things -- prevent you from putting Christ first in your life?

Together, let us echo the words of Carlo Acutis:

"Being a saint is not complicated. It's simply loving God."

Let's lead our teens and young adults to encounter Christ and dare them to live like the saints they -- and WE -- are created and called to be. Come, Holy Spirit. Make us saints. St. Carlo Acutis, pray for us. St. Pier Giorgio Frassati, pray for us! AMEN!

[Readings: Num. 21:4b-9; Ps. 78; Phil. 2:6-11; John 3:13-17]

Have you ever been in a situation where you had to go against the grain, take a stand that was unpopular among your friends, family and peers? The youthful college student evangelizer Charlie Kirk did that for most of his brief adult life. This week, it cost him that brief life.

Not everyone welcomes the Good News, especially if it means having to change some regular patterns of thinking in their lives. If it means changing what prejudices and hatreds they learned growing up. It means ongoing conversion.

We might call this the Nicodemus experience – breaking from the pack to follow a teacher who brings faith to life for you. Cherish and honor your own “inner Nicodemus,” especially when it comes time to take an unpopular stand for the sake of your Catholic faith.

Teachers should know more than their students. I think most of us hope that the people who are training us in any capacity have more expertise than those whom they are teaching. But we’ve probably all taken courses in which we found out that we knew more than our teachers, or we’ve held jobs in which we had more experience and talent than our supervisors did.

Nicodemus has such a credibility gap. He’s a teacher of the people, a member of the Sanhedrin. Yet after hearing Jesus, Nicodemus realizes he’s discovered a teacher who knows more than he does. And when Jesus tells him that the way to all truth includes being “born again,” Nicodemus misunderstands him, imagining an impossible second physical birth. Returning to the womb to be reborn.

Nicodemus should not have been so uncomprehending. Judaism itself expected a second birth from those attracted to its teachings. The fact that Nicodemus questions this image implies that he's not been doing HIS homework.

Yet there's something redeemable about Nicodemus. He keeps coming back to Jesus even under cover of darkness, afraid to be recognized and known as a disciple. He may be ignorant, but at least he knows that he does not know -- which puts him far ahead of the unthinking mobs in the streets. And far ahead most of the Pharisees, Sadducees and elders in the Temple.

Jesus tells him that second birth means that he has to start over, from scratch, a new beginning, and Nicodemus is prepared to try. This puts him head and shoulders above the multitudes who listen to Jesus politely for an afternoon, chalk up the experience as amusing or interesting, even entertaining and return to their usual routines.

Those who stay, like Nicodemus, will have their ignorance challenged, their understanding broadened. They'll learn that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. They'll come to know that Jesus doesn't come to judge and condemn the world, but to rescue it.

Those who hang around for the long haul will come to experience the sign at the center of great mystery: the Holy Cross of Jesus Christ. They will come to appreciate that a second birth is also a form of death to the old way of seeing and believing and behaving. The Holy Cross changes everything. It makes the strange specter of death into an ally toward fuller, more abundant life.

Two of the most freeing experiences in my priesthood have happened in the last twenty years of my life. The first, was when I realized that I was not God. Took me twenty years to learn that. I am not God. I am not Super Priest or Super Pastor. God is God and I am just Fr. Nick. The second, was learning that I didn't know everything. That led me to say to my staff and to my parishioners, "I glory in my imperfection." That doesn't mean that ignorance is bliss. It means that you and I are still learning.

Like Nicodemus, we are still students of life and students of faith. We don't have all the answers. We cannot do everything ourselves. And there is a great freedom in that.

On this Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we are invited to ask ourselves, "Why did Jesus Christ do it? Why did He suffer the indescribable trauma of being scourged, having a crown of thorns smashed onto His head, and suffering the most humiliating and painful form of death – crucifixion? The answer comes from today's Gospel: John 3:16-17: *"For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through Him."* The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross freed us from our sins.

That's what Jesus Christ learned on the Cross. That's what we learn when we unite ourselves and the crosses life throws our way, to the Holy Cross of the Crucified Christ. When we move from grumbling and complaining to letting go of our ego and letting go of our desire to be in control. It is both thrilling and terrifying! AMEN!

[Readings: Amos 8:4-7; Psalm 113; 1 Timothy 2:1-8; Luke 16:1-13]

“Beloved: First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. Without arguing, anger and resentment (1 Tim 2:1-2).”

It seems that at no time in our history as a nation has there been such a great need for “supplications, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings,” right? I heard on the news this week that a record number of U.S. Senators and Representatives have announced that they will not be seeking re-election this year. The largest number in our nation’s history. Why? Because two of our most cherished rights – the right to free speech and the right of religious freedom – are being eroded, sliced and diced. I wonder what our Founding Fathers and Mothers would have to say if they could see what our political and social culture have become in our country.

As Catholics, we respect those who disagree with what we preach, teach and strive for to live out daily. Can they respect us? We advocate for the dignity of all persons, a dignity that includes a life free from violence and persecution. People of faith are a source of American strength. An inclusive and religiously diverse society should make room for them.

Our First Reading and our Gospel today speak about people who con others with their words and actions. Amos judges the political and religious leaders of his day and warns of the collapse of the Northern Kingdom of Israel because of inward corruption and outward military attack.

He condemns them for enjoying a wealthy and comfortable life at the expense of the general public, and for the neglect and abuse of the poor. In our country – and in our world -- it appears that the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer.

Jesus tells a parable today about a man whose ethics were certainly out of whack, but his sense of survival was kicking in at full speed. He was taking a risk, of course the risk that his boss would have him thrown in jail.

That's what COULD have happened. But remember this: the amount he cut off on the debtor's bills was HIS commission, not his boss's! That's why the boss calls him clever.

A steward is one who has the management of his master's property, and is answerable for the care of his land. Today we learn that we are not masters of what we possess, but rather stewards of that which is another's – all of our possessions come from God. Although we might seem to be the absolute masters of our own possessions, yet with respect to God, who is Lord over all, we are only stewards. Because, whatever we own and have, God gives us for the relief of the poor. Jewish stewards were expected to give one tenth of their financial wealth to the temple leaders for their ministry. That is what we call a "tithe." The expectation was to give 10% of your income back to God.

What does St. Augustine say? "To me, the meaning of the passage seems this; that whatever the Jews do for the priests and Levites, should be more liberally provided for in the Catholic Church; if the Jews give a tenth, Christians should give a half, as Zacchaeus gave, or at least they should give two tenths, and thus exceed the payments of the Jews." I don't expect anyone here to give half of their income to the Church and charity, but 10% would be good. As I like to say, God is our Jewish manager, and he wants his 10%!

20% would be even better, and some of our parishioners do give that.

Today's Gospel parable was directed against the avarice, greed and self-comfort of the Pharisees. And our own selfishness.

We are taught to use our riches not for our own selfish ends, but for the relief of our poorer brothers and sisters, children and elderly, so that we may give a good account of our stewardship, and obtain our due reward on the Day of Judgement. This is why the unjust steward is held up as an example, and not because of his injustice and fraud.

Three lessons for us to learn today:

- 1.) That all of our money, our health, and our intellect are gifts from God.
- (2.) We are to use these gifts and talents for the honor and glory of God.

(3.) That on Judgement Day, you and I will have to give an account, not only for the sins which we have committed, but also for duties which we have neglected to perform.

This weekend, we commission and bless our catechists on this annual Catechetical Sunday. We thank them for taking the risk to share their faith with others in the parish. We bless our parents, grandparents and guardians who are called to be the first and best teachers of the Catholic Faith for their children. And we accept the promises made by our Confirmation candidates to grow and learn their Catholic Faith and to put it into practice for the rest of their lives.

The theme for Catechetical Sunday 2025 is “Always be ready to give an explanation... for a reason for your hope” (1 Peter 3:15.) The theme emphasizes the importance of being prepared to share the foundations of one’s faith and the hope that comes from it.

It encourages individuals to reflect on their role in evangelization and catechesis, reminding them to communicate their beliefs with gentleness and respect, as highlighted in the Scriptures.

This theme aligns with the Church's mission of fostering a deeper understanding of faith among its members and encouraging them to actively participate in sharing the Gospel. It serves as a reminder that every baptized person --- that means you and I -- has a role in handing on the faith and witnessing to the teachings of Christ.

In a nutshell: catechesis is the ACT of teaching and learning; a catechist is the ONE who teaches and learns; the catechumenate is the group of people WHO are learning; and catechism is WHAT is being taught or is being learned.

Evangelization is giving personal witness to the activity of the Holy Spirit in your life, sharing with others your personal relationship with Jesus Christ and listening to God speak to you and to others through the Good News of His Holy Word.

One commentator suggests that Catechetical Sunday should be elevated to a solemnity. The color of today’s vestments would be red, because religion teachers are the unsung martyrs of the church.

Pope St. John XXIII understood this when he advised the young man who insisted he wanted to sacrifice his life for the Gospel as a missionary martyr.

The pope said, "Don't be a martyr. Be a teacher. It's much harder."

May we never tire of learning, teaching and proclaiming our Catholic faith!

AMEN!

[Readings: Amos 6:1a. 4-7; Ps. 146; 1 Tim. 6:11-16; Luke 16:19-31]

One comic strip that I am particularly fond of is Garfield the Cat. There is a great humor in those sarcastic witticisms of his. I like his take on depression. It is a four-panel cartoon, which only has him resting on his arms, looking out to the viewer. In the first panel, he sighs and says, "I'm down." Second panel: "I'm really down." Third panel, "Down, down, down." Fourth panel: "Down doobie-doo down down..." (From the song *"Breaking Up is Hard to Do"*).

Another comic strip points to our Gospel today. One cold winter night, Garfield is sitting on the living room couch, looking out the window. He sees Odie the Dog peering through the window, nose pressed against the glass, scratching to get in. Garfield thinks to himself: "This is horrible. Here I am in the comfort of a warm house, well fed, and there is Odie outside begging to get in, cold and hungry. I can't stand it anymore. I just can't stand it. I've got to do something." So he goes over to the window... and closes the curtains!

Rather than dealing with the needy, some of us have simply chosen to close the curtains. All of the rich people in today's readings lose their futures not through their riches, but by the lack of concern for others less fortunate, which ultimately results in lack of concern for their own eternal fate. Where can YOU be more attentive to others, especially those most in need now, before it's too late?

"Charity begins at home," the saying goes. That's also where it ends, for folks who draw a small circle of responsibility. Some of us turn our focus of concern on only our own immediate family.

Others may extend it briefly to include elder relatives, close friends, or grandchildren who are in financial need.

For those with a cultivated sense of community, generosity might be extended through the neighborhood, parish, village, or tribe. We reach out very generously here at St. Martin's to the poor. Thank you all for that. And for being an example to others of generous stewardship. We are not all lost!

In this regard, the rich man at his sumptuous dinner didn't owe poor Lazarus a thing, because by Jewish law, Lazarus' own relatives should have been seeing to the needs of this unfortunate fellow.

But how does any of that imply that his dire plight is OURS to solve? Most of us like to find ways like these to wash our hands of the suffering that lies beyond our realm of perceived responsibility.

The rich man in the story is no different. We don't know the name of the rich man, because his name may be ours. The rich man knew Lazarus by name, which makes his sin even greater as he chose to walk by him, walk over him, and ignore him as he went back and forth from home. But we do know that his sin was complacency.

The blindness of the rich man is egregious according to the law of Israel. Almsgiving is not an optional practice for the faithful. It is a command. Helping the less fortunate is not a voluntary option, it is a commandment!

The God who has given us the world as a gift, who gave us the Law as gift, who gave us the land as gift, wants Israel to give gifts to the hungry, the thirsty, the lonely, the widow and the orphan. The rich man's complacency is not merely against Lazarus. It is against God, against the Law written by the hand of the Lord.

The rich man didn't even have to go far to carry out his duty. Lazarus was just outside his gate. And yet the rich man is like those whom Amos castigates, "the complacent in Zion" who dine inclined upon their ivory couches, all the while enjoying pleasant music (Am. 6:1). Get this: The rich man is arrogant in life, but even more so in death as he dares to order around both Father Abraham AND Lazarus in the next world! What cheek! All too soon, the rich man will learn to his dismay that Father Abraham is the father of Lazarus as well. The last words of Abraham in the Gospel are chilling. Jesus's parables ask us to take sides. And we tend to take the side of the good guy. Then the parable turns on us.

Are we not the ones who are complacent? Have we not listened to the voice of Jesus? For us Christians, complacency is the road to hell. It is the hell of contempt for the poor. It is the hellacious contempt toward God. Unlike the rich man, there's still time for us to stop being complacent.

Start by looking to discover there the Lazarus waiting for a morsel of food, a kind word, a love that unites rather than isolates. Who hungers for us to say, please, thank you, forgive me, I forgive you? How far is our love and compassion obliged to go?

More to the point: How far is our obligation to *do something* about human suffering expected to go?

St. Paul writes to Timothy in our Second Reading: pursue righteousness, patience and gentleness. Not only with the folks we know, but with the folks we don't know. Pray: "Lord, let me see others through YOUR eyes, as You see them." Jesus takes down our walls of bias brick by brick with teachings about loving enemies,

blessing those who curse us, returning good for evil, and forgiveness for injury. When Jesus forgives His murderers from the cross, there's nowhere to hide from the truth: We cannot disown anyone.

Charity may begin at home, but it can't stay there. Our humanity makes us one. Our humanity gives us dignity. Our humanity gives us the right to a voice. Together we seek the common good: closing the great chasm between Lazarus and us. Here, in this world, while we still have the time to do it before we die.

A Sunday school teacher told his class today's story about the rich man and Lazarus. He pointed out how one man went to Hell and the other man went to Heaven. He also pointed out how rich one man was and how poor the other man was. After the teacher taught his lesson he said to the class, "Now which would you rather be, the rich man or Lazarus?" One clever boy raised his hand and said, "Well, I'd like to be the rich man while I'm alive, and Lazarus when I'm dead!" Whatever decision you make today, when you die, you will live with its consequences for all eternity.

Choose wisely, choose well, and open those curtains. AMEN!