

HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
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My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's representative to the United States, I wish to express the spiritual closeness and paternal affection of His Holiness to all gathered here, as well as to those watching on television, courtesy of the Eternal Word Television Network, and to those joining through radio or live-streaming.

Today begins National Vocation Awareness Week in the United States. As I look out from this pulpit, I see the beautiful relief at the back of this basilica of the universal call to holiness, reminding us that sanctity is not for the privileged few but for all of us. At the beginning of his exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, the Holy Father said that "The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence." (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE*, 19 MARCH 2018).

This sanctity often happens in ordinary life. The images of canonized saints, scattered throughout the basilica, recall the men and women who dedicated themselves completely to the service of God and neighbor, and serve as reminders that this is possible for us too. The saints were fragile people like us too – fragile, but open to the gentle power of Christ. It was the mystery of Christ that overtook their lives and directed their lives toward God. They constitute a "*great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue,*" and they cry out "*Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb.*"

They constitute a "*great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue.*" Yesterday in Hartford, Father Michael McGivney, the founder of the Knights of Columbus, was beatified, becoming the first American parish priest to be so honored. Father McGivney, the son of Irish immigrants, helped build a fraternal organization to keep Catholic men from falling away from the faith; to welcome the new immigrants, during an age when many from Ireland were told: "No Irish Need Apply." He founded his organization to support widows and orphans to keep Catholic families together. In an age in which priests are often maligned, Blessed Michael McGivney reminds us of what priests can do to build fraternity, to be a force for unity, and to excel in charity. The whole Church in the United States should rejoice on this occasion and learn from the example of Blessed Michael McGivney.

Pope Francis teaches that "The Holy Spirit bestows holiness in abundance among God's holy and faithful people, for 'it has pleased God to make men and women holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather as a people who might acknowledge him in truth and serve him in holiness.'" (Ibid., 6)

This was re-emphasized in his recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, where he wrote of the "need to develop the awareness that nowadays we are either all saved together or no one is saved." (POPE FRANCIS, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *FRATELLI TUTTI*, 3 OCTOBER 2020, 137) Convinced of the corporate journey of the Church on

earth toward the heavenly Jerusalem, the Holy Father invites us to reflect on the saints, who understood that the beauty of life is found in communion:

No one can experience the true beauty of life without relating to others, without having real faces to love. This is part of the mystery of authentic human existence. “Life exists where there is bonding, communion, fraternity; and life is stronger than death when it is built on true relationships and bonds of fidelity. On the contrary, there is no life when we claim to be self-sufficient and live as islands: in these attitudes, death prevails”. (Ibid., 187)

Yet, this beauty and holiness of life is not simply for the old and the wise, but often shines through young people. The Second Reading from the First Letter of St. John invites us to “*See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God.*” Spiritual childhood, which necessarily involves great humility, is seen in giant saints like St. Therese of Lisieux, whose Little Way marks a sure path for holiness for us.

In his exhortation following the Synod on Youth, Pope Francis reminded the whole Church that “through the holiness of the young, the Church can renew her spiritual ardor and her apostolic vigor” and that this balm of holiness, coming forth from the young “can heal the wounds of the Church and of the world, bringing us back to the fullness of love to which we have always been called,” (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *CHRISTUS VIVIT*, 25 MARCH 2019, 50)

In that same exhortation, Pope Francis dedicated three paragraphs to a young man, Carlo Acutis, who was beatified one month ago in Assisi and who died at age 15 in 2006, but his whole life provides for us a road map as to how we too can grow in holiness. He had an advanced awareness of the meaning of life and how to live well, saying that “To be always united to Jesus is my program of life.”

Holiness consists in union with God. God has created each one of us for some purpose. Each person is called to unite himself or herself to God, but each person is unique. God communicates His love to each of us in a special way. Thus, Carlo could say, “Everyone is born an original, but many people end up dying as photocopies.”

While we strive to imitate the saints, we must be ourselves. St. Francis de Sales says, “Be who you are and be that well in honor of the Master Craftsman whose handiwork you are.” Remembering our relationship with God – making Him the program of our life – is essential to growing in holiness.

Blessed Carlo was also very devoted to the Eucharist. He called the Eucharist, “my highway to heaven.” It’s a useful image when we think of the Church on her pilgrim journey. We can take a long, winding path with many obstacles and detours, or we can get on the “super highway” to heaven. The Eucharist is our Food for the journey, which keeps us strong and energizes us, but since the Eucharist is Jesus Himself, we receive the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Little Carlo attended daily Mass from the time he was seven and spent time each day in adoration, bringing about his parents’ conversion, saying “The more Eucharist we receive, the more we will become like Jesus.” How simple yet profound! How many people took the Eucharist for granted until the pandemic! Find for me a single saint who was not devoted to the Eucharist!

Holiness demands being united to Jesus in our program of life – prayer and works – and in the Holy Eucharist. Blessed Carlo Acutis, like so many saints, was also devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, remarking that “The Virgin Mary is the only woman in my life.” We have just completed the month of the Rosary, which he prayed daily, and which he called the “shortest ladder to climb to heaven” and the “most powerful weapon,” after the Eucharist, “to fight the devil.”

One can hardly separate Jesus from his Mother. Nor can one separate Christ from His Church. Blessed Carlo practiced his faith within the community, and he said “To criticize the Church means to criticize ourselves,” he said, because “the Church is the dispenser of treasures for our salvation.”

We ought to judge the Church, not by those who do not live according to her teachings (for we are all sinners) but by those who do, which is why he drew near to the saints, like Saint Francis of Assisi and great young saints like Tarcisius, Aloysius, and Dominic Savio.

If we think about this young, blessed of the Church, he was like many young people of his age. He was somewhat mischievous with a great sense of humor; he loved video games and dressed in the fashions of the day, and grew up in a family a lot like ours. His spirituality consisted of prayer, devotion to the Eucharist and the Virgin, Mass and the Rosary, and a love for his community. He did ordinary things but with extraordinarily love for God and his neighbor. Do not settle for a mediocre existence but strive to be a saint. God has made you for greatness.

This young person offers us a witness to innocence and holiness of life. In him, we see how one of the beatitudes is incarnated: *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.* The saints behold the face of God and live in Him forever. Through their prayers, may we be granted the grace to join them in crying out, *“Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”*