

23rd Sunday (C)

7th September 2025

'Nuovi santi: Pier Giorgio Frassati & Carlo Acutis'

Wis 9: *who can discern what the Lord wills?*

Phil: *have him back, no longer as a bondservant, but as a beloved brother*

Lk 14:25–33: *the unfinished tower ... the king marching to war ...*

Had Pope Francis not died on Easter Monday, there would by now have been two canonizations in Rome tied into major events of this Jubilee 'Holy Year' 2025: one would have been on the Sunday during the 'Jubilee of Teenagers,' the Sunday after Easter, that of **Carlo Acutis**; the other would have been on the final day of the 'Jubilee of Youth', the first Sunday of August, at *Tor Vergata*, that of **Pier Giorgio Frassati**. But, when Pope Francis died, and the Church entered into its mourning period, the Carlo Acutis canonization got deferred. As a result, Pope Leo took the decision that both these canonizations would take place today, Sunday 7th September. Many tens of thousands, then, will return to Rome for this morning, to be there at this double canonization of two Italian young men, one who lived at the start of the twentieth century, the other who lived 100 yrs later at the start of this century. Yet, though they lived a century apart, there are some

remarkable similarities, and they both give us great inspiration as young Catholics of our own day; there is a great outpouring of love & fervour for their being our newest saints.

Pier Giorgio Frassati is the earlier of the two, being born in April 1901. He lived the bulk of his life in Turin and in the holidays in the mountainous countryside to the north of Turin, and was the son of an Italian senator, a national-newspaper owner. He died in July 1925, 100 yrs ago, at the age of 24, and his shrine is in Turin Cathedral. **Carlo Acutis** is the more recent young man being declared a saint today: born in London in May 1991, but living most of his life in Milan, until his early death in October 2006 at the age of just 15; his burial, at his own request, was in Assisi, city of St Francis and St Clare, and his shrine is now in one of the churches of Assisi, *S. Maria Maggiore*, just of the central square.

I want to comment on some similarities in these two lives, which led them each from quite ordinary backgrounds to the sanctity that we celebrate in a formal

way today, in Rome and across the whole Church:

- i. **The Family Background.** Both Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis were born into relatively privileged backgrounds, where money was not, in general, wanting. Both were born into Catholic families, and were baptized as babies — Carlo Acutis being baptized in one of the parishes of this diocese, on the Fulham Rd. But neither of their families was very devout. Pier Giorgio's father was effectively a liberal-leaning agnostic, and his mother was, as they say, "*cattolica ma non fanatica*" (Sunday Mass was enough for each week, but no more than that.) Carlo Acutis's family was quite lapsed, and beyond the Baptism of their son, they would not have made many greater efforts at bringing Carlo up in the faith. A Catholic upbringing in their respective families, then, was far from ideal, and yet God had great plans for them, plans not de-railed by the lack of family faith.
- ii. **Character.** Both of them as young boys were full

of life and joviality — rather remarkably, in the case of Pier Giorgio, as his parents were very strict, very critical, and not at all affectionate. Yet both had a character of boyish liveliness that made them attractive and popular and kind. They both were practical jokers, and liked to make people laugh; they were both very sporty and loved the outdoors: Pier Giorgio became renowned for his cycling and mountaineering; and Carlo — a more modern pursuit — became very tech-savvy and was a whizz-kid at the internet, programming, and computer games. Both very active, then, boy-like in their extensive interests, as so many of their age and prosperity. And yet, in each of them there was something else at work, as well, something different, that set them apart.

- iii. **Coming to Faith.** They each developed at a very early age a desire for prayerful devotion and holiness. As I said, this was perhaps surprising, since neither of them had been brought up in a

household with any great Catholic fervour. But, somehow, the thirst for Christ broke into their lives despite this lack of devotion at home. Each of them was blessed with some fine Catholic schooling, and the influence of religious sisters and Jesuit priests. Pier Giorgio's parents tried to counter the increasing prayerfulness of their son, aged around 12, opposing his growing desire to pray, go to Confession, recite the Rosary, attend Mass and receive Holy Communion daily — it took him some 4 days of persuasion, but he was quite determined in this intention, and he won them over. Carlo made a similar journey, at an even earlier age, with a consecration to Our Lady of Pompeii at the age of 5, and a desire to engage the whole family in a daily Rosary thereafter. Before long, he was getting his mother back to Mass, urging that they go to daily Mass; and his mother started having to take some catechism classes, and even theology studies, in order to answer her little boy's deep and searching

questions. Carlo was allowed to make his First Holy Communion a bit younger than most — he had just turned 7 — and it took place privately at the convent of some enclosed nuns, who testified later to the specialness of that occasion, and the radiance of the young communicant.

- iv. **The Eucharist.** Indeed, the Holy Eucharist held a very special place in the lives of both our new saints, with their devotion to daily Mass coming at a young age in their lives. Carlo's thirst for knowledge of, and interest in, the Eucharist went far beyond this, however, and he was committed to Eucharistic Adoration, and then to his great lifetime's work of putting together the world-famous web-based [encyclopaedia of Eucharistic miracles](#). This prodigious work, still viewable today, after his death, is a testament to how much he dearly loved Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, and how he took great store from these miracles that Our Lord has allowed from time to time in the Church, to bolster our faith.

v. **The Care of the Poor.** Although both Pier Giorgio and Carlo were born into relatively prosperity, and that could have been to the detriment of their sanctity — as money, possessions and a seeming life of ease in a material sense can often detract from a life of committed Christian faith — this remarkably did not happen for them. Again, in rather parallel fashion, they each cultivated a habit of giving to the poor; from the plenty that they had, they gave to the poor, quietly, unassumingly, often in hidden ways. Each became renowned for their outreach to the poor. Pier Giorgio worked with the SVP even when at school, and would often give away even his own clothes or bus pass, and be generously practical about helping the homeless find accommodation, or the out-of-work get the tools for their trade. Carlo Acutis likewise worked with the Missionaries of Charity soup kitchen; he developed friendships with local beggars and saved up his pocket money to give it away to the needy.

vi. **The Early Death.** Another obvious connection between Pier Giorgio & Carlo is the fact of their early deaths. Each died after short illnesses. Pier Giorgio only developed the pains of polio in June 1925, but with his own grandmother dying at this time, he didn't complain of his own sufferings; he died early next month at 24. Carlo's final illness was even shorter: his diagnosis with leukemia was at the start of October 2006, and he died on the 12th, at the age of just 15. Both were uncomplaining in their terminal illness, and showed an exemplary attitude, full of faith, offering their sufferings for the good of others and of the Church. Carlo said, "*Golgotha is for everyone. No-one escapes the Cross. ... Sadness is looking at ourselves; happiness is looking at God. ... Our goal must be infinite, not the finite. The infinite is our homeland. Heaven has been waiting for us for ever.*" Their funerals were full to overflowing, and with people their families had never known: all those whose lives had been

touched by these saints, especially the poor.

The Church celebrates the canonization of these two extraordinary young men, who came to holiness in their youth, on a Sunday when we hear Jesus proclaim in the Gospel that we are not to rely on our own resources, but only on His strength. *He is the King* that can march with invincible powers; we are not alone able to defeat the evil that threatens us; we have to fall in line with Him. The little parables in Lk 14 insist that we do not try to rely to our own resources if you are to achieve anything truly meaningful spiritually; instead, Jesus says, “renounce all that you have” in order to “be My disciple.”

Pier Giorgio Frassati & Carlo Acutis took this command seriously — *literally* — and were absolutely committed to it. That’s why so many hundreds gathered at their funerals in 1925 and 2006, and why today in 2025, as their life stories have become known, there are tens of thousands gathered today to honour them in St Peters’ Sq as their canonization is solemnly declared by Pope Leo. *It is possible to live such a life*; these two ordinary, funny,

sporty young men — who lived a short life and died young — are also such exemplars of a youthful *holiness, prayer, Eucharistic love, and practical charity* ... the essence of any Christian life. Despite their youth and their upbringing in households lukewarm in faith, they led their own families back to faith. Despite their family’s material comfort, they gave away their possessions, and made real friends with the poor, and laid up treasure in heaven. May they inspire us, and from the bliss of their heavenly home with Jesus and Mary whom they loved, pray for us and help us live our own daily life the sort of committed Christianity that they proved was possible. Thank God for new saints, saints of our recent times; thank God for these particular young men, whom God has guided to being witnesses of holiness for us now in the 21st c.

St Pier Giorgio Frassati, pray for us!

St Carlo Acutis, pray for us, and all the Catholic youth of the Church today!