

*Given at Corpus Christi, Maiden Lane on 12<sup>th</sup> October for the blessing of the shrine of Blessed Carlo Acutis*

## The Eucharist: My Highway to Heaven

Jesus is emphatic. Twice he tells us today, 'Anyone who eats this bread will live forever.' And Carlo was equally clear. 'The Eucharist is my highway to heaven,' he would say. He believed, 'You go straight to heaven if you participate in the Mass every day.'

He was so keen to make his First Holy Communion that he was given permission to make it early. It's deeply touching to read the account of his behaviour that day, recorded as it was for us by one of the Sisters where he attended Mass. 'Composed and calm during the time of Holy Mass,' she writes, 'he began to show signs of impatience as the time to receive Holy Communion approached. With Jesus in his heart, after holding his head in his hands, he began to move as if he could no longer sit still. It seemed that something had happened in him, only known to him, something too big that he could not contain.'<sup>[1]</sup>

Whatever happened, it gave him a desire to receive Holy Communion every day. After some years of receiving daily, he used to say, 'The more we receive the Eucharist, the more we will become like Jesus, so that on this earth we will have a foretaste of heaven.' His mother Antonia, by her own admission, was not a regular Mass-goer at all. But Carlo's love for the Eucharist encouraged her return to Mass; and she found she loved it! Carlo was so full of questions that she decided she had better do some studying; and she loved that too! It's a wonderful example of a child evangelising his mother!

But no one should think Carlo was the shy, retiring type. You need only surf the net for images and videos of him to see he was often the life and soul of the party. They say he was very amusing in class, amusing but never unkind.

He had a reputation for defending the underdog. He took to heart the injunction we heard just now from Paul, in his letter to the Philippians: 'Your tolerance (should) be evident to everyone.' It's touching to learn he had a particular care for those who were bullied; and for those whose parents were separating: he would ask his mother if he couldn't invite them round to cheer them up.

If he had a heart for those who suffered, he was also developing a heart for the poor. His mother got used to him asking her what clothes they might spare for the man on the street. He grasped, he got, St James's plea to Christians to realise that 'faith without works is dead.'

'What do you think?' he would say. 'Is God more pleased with a service like this, generous and tireless, to the least ones of this world, or with prayer?'

'A life will be really beautiful,' he once said, 'if we come to love God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves.'

He was clear: he wanted to be a saint. In this, he resembled another young disciple of Christ, young Therese Martin, St Therese of Lisieux. 'I want to be a saint!' she would cry. 'The only thing we have to ask for in prayer,' Carlo would say, 'is the desire to be holy.'

And he shared with Therese a deep love for the Gospels. 'Above all it's the Gospels that occupy my mind when I'm in prayer,' wrote Therese. 'I'm always finding fresh lights there; hidden meanings which had meant nothing to me hitherto.' Carlo would say, similarly, about reading the Gospels 'Within me, I find a word that (Jesus) sends me; a moment of the Gospel that fills me with conviction and certainty.'

We know Carlo sensed, from a young age, that he would die young. '*Sono destinato a morire*,' he would say. 'I'm destined to die young.' But he was in no doubt that it would be to go and be with Jesus. Of Jesus's promise - 'Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood ... I shall raise up on the last day', he was utterly convinced. 'Something extraordinary happens to us ... in eternal life,' he would say. 'Death is the start of new life.' Yet, at the same time, he was under no illusion about suffering.

On his deathbed, he told his mother, 'Mama, Golgotha is for everyone. No one escapes the cross.' 'I'm not getting out of here,' he told her the day he was admitted to hospital. He chose there and then to offer his suffering and death for three entities: for Jesus, for the Church and for Pope Benedict.

Carlo is a good saint to ask to be with us when we come to Golgotha ourselves.

Ask him meanwhile to be your guide in this life too. There's a roadmap, suggests Fr Anthony Figueiredo, in all that Carlo did and said which we should seek to make our own. It's captured in Carlo's own saying: 'Always to be united with Jesus: this is my programme for life' as he would say.

Fr Anthony suggests Carlo holds out to each one of us a programme which can be summarised in five stages.<sup>[2]</sup> The first is frequent reception of the Eucharist.

'With the fruits of daily Eucharist,' says Carlo, 'souls sanctify themselves and are strengthened especially in dangerous situations that could harm their eternal salvation.'

The second is Eucharistic Adoration. Carlo was inspired by St Francis's devotion to Eucharistic devotion. He said he liked to use the time spent before the Blessed Sacrament 'to speak to Jesus about all that I am living and feeling.' The third is to have a Spiritual Guide and to make regular Confession. 'The only thing that we must really fear is sin,' he would say; and liked to go to Confession weekly.

The fourth is devotion to our Blessed Mother and the Saints. It's interesting to hear he found particular inspiration in Saints Francis, Clare, John the Apostle, John Bosco and Bernadette. He went to Fatima the year he died. The church in which he was baptised here in our Diocese, at Our Lady of Dolours in Fulham, was dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima. He used to describe his daily Rosary as 'the most gracious appointment of the day.'

The fifth is charity. 'Life is a gift,' he used to say. 'As long as we are upon this planet, we can increase our level of charity.' I'd like to suggest that one word really sums up this programme of Carlo's; and that is fidelity: fidelity to Christ in the Mass, in Eucharistic Adoration, fidelity to Confession, fidelity to Our Lady and the saints, fidelity to Christ in the poor.

It's partly to encourage us in our own fidelity to these things that we have been given this relic of Bl. Carlo. What a joy that we should possess such a concrete, tangible link with him. Of course, it was in the presence of such a relic that a miracle was wrought that enabled Carlo to be declared Blessed.

I'd like to finish by reminding you of that remarkable story. Again, we are indebted to Fr Anthony for the details.

It happened on this very day, 12<sup>th</sup> October, in the year 2013, on the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. Fr Marcelo, Parish Priest of a small Brazilian parish, had given Carlo's father a picture of Our Lady Aparecida to place in Carlo's bedroom. Fr Marcelo prayed that, with Mary's help, a miracle might be wrought through Carlo's intercession in his parish. Meanwhile, Fr Marcelo brought to his parish a relic of Carlo given him by Antonia.

On 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013, Fr Marcelo held a special Mass at the end of which he invited the people to come forward and venerate the relic. Among them was four-year-old Mattheus who was accompanied by his grandfather. Mattheus suffered from annular pancreas, a disease which made him vomit continually, so much so that he became weaker and weaker and desperately light. His body rejected everything he ate and drank. Queuing up with his grandfather, he said, 'What shall I pray for?' 'Ask to stop vomiting,' his grandfather said.

And so he did: when it came to his turn, little Mattheus held up the relic and said, 'I wish I could stop vomiting so much.' On the way home, Mattheus said he knew he'd been cured. The proof was that, once home, he asked for chips, rice, beans and steak – all his brothers' favourite foods – and ate the lot without once vomiting. Nor has he ever vomited since. His pancreas has completely healed; and the doctors can't explain the transformation in him. It was the miracle that opened the door to Carlo's Beatification seven years later.

The Scriptures teach us to say, 'The Lord gives. The Lord takes away. Blessed be the Lord.' In Carlo, the Lord did indeed give to the world a beautiful human being. In his dying, his parents were denied their dearest possession on earth: he

was literally taken away from them. And yet they have to admit their dear Carlo is doing extraordinarily beautiful things on earth, even working miracles, for which the Lord is truly to be blessed.

On this night, we might pray especially for his parents Andrea and Antonia, as we ask Blessed Carlo to pray for us also; to bless each one of us here, poor sinners that we are, and help us find our faltering stumbling way to heaven; and please to be there to welcome us when at last we reach the door to our heavenly home.

Amen.

[1] Mgr Anthony Figueiredo, *Blessed Carlo Acutis, 5 Steps to Being a Saint*, London 2021, 25

[2] *op. cit.* 27 ff.