

## Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

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*IS 5:1-7*

*PHIL 4:6-9*

*MT 21:33-43*

Today we (and by “we” I mean just us) celebrate the feast of our patron saint, St. Francis of Assisi, while the rest of the Church observes the Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time. Because he is our patron Saint, we are permitted to celebrate his feast (October 4) even though it falls on a Sunday. That might not seem like a big deal but given the year we’ve had...I’ll take whatever we can get! Normally, on this weekend, we would host a pet blessing, the Rosary Run and Oktoberfest but obviously, things are different this year and we are unable to conduct “business as usual” so if the best we can do is celebrate his feast day on a Sunday then so be it!

With this in mind, I’d like to focus my homily on St. Francis but not directly on him but on two people who were highly influenced by him—St. Clare of Assisi and soon-to-be “Blessed” Servant of God Carlo Acutis. One lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the other in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

When I first came to St. Francis 8 years ago, I discovered how little I knew about his life. I mean, I knew of his love of animals and nature and that he came from a rich family but I didn’t know just how serious he was about living his faith and the sacrifices he made because he loved Christ more than anything else. So, I read a few books and as I studied his life, I also discovered one of his closest friends and another serious Catholic, St. Clare. She too came from a wealthy family. She was intrigued by St. Francis and the way of life he promoted. She was influenced by him so much that she too left her earthly inheritance and gave her life to Christ. She was such a spiritual person in her own right that St. Francis himself went to her for spiritual direction and inspiration.

They were good friends and fellow disciples and both saints are buried in Assisi in Umbria, Italy, their hometown. They both founded religious communities—he, the Franciscans and she the Poor Clares—and both were reformers of the Medieval Church. They promoted a message that motivated people to turn away from the things of this world and dedicate themselves to the spiritual realm and to live for Christ with heaven as their ultimate goal.

I was so impressed by St. Clare that I wanted to name our new Family Life Center after her and call it “The Clare Center” but when I mentioned the idea to the long-range planning committee and the building committee, they were less than thrilled. Like me they didn’t know much about her so I couldn’t blame them. But when it came to naming the playground and park at the corner of 18<sup>th</sup> and Virginia Avenue I learned an important

lesson...don't ask them! Instead, I just started calling it St. Clare Park and before I knew it others were doing the same. And just like that St. Clare Park was born.

Several week ago, we installed a statue of St. Clare in the park thanks to a generous donation from Harold and Theresa Henfling. And thanks to Mary Clare Thele we are going to add some landscaping around the statue. But don't hold your breath...our landscaper is good but very slow. Hopefully soon we will have a blessing of the statue. I decided to dedicate St. Clare Park to all those who made a contribution to the "Build Up My Church" Capital Campaign that made St. Clare Park and the other five projects possible.

One of the most powerful stories about St. Clare comes toward the end of her life and it is why she is often shown carrying a monstrance in her hands (just like our statue). During her lifetime there were constant battles being waged between neighboring towns and villages but a rather large holy war between the Holy See and the Saracens was gaining momentum. Any town that was dedicated to the Lord was at the top of their "hit list" and so a large group of Saracens descended upon Assisi one night. St. Clare had been sick for a long time and was already in bed when her sisters informed her that the soldiers were nearby. She told them not to fear because the Lord would defend them. Then she took the Blessed Sacrament from the Tabernacle and placed it in the monstrance and because she couldn't walk her sisters carried her to the courtyard of the convent. She didn't know what would happen to her and her sisters but like Christ, St. Clare would surrender herself to her aggressors but not without putting Him between herself and them.

St. Clare placed the monstrance in a prominent place and then laid prostrate before the Lord, adoring him in the Eucharist. When the Saracens rushed into the cloister, they were shocked at what they saw: a frail elderly nun in a patched tunic lying face down before a mysterious "container" and around her many other women dressed the same way and in the exact same position. St. Clare and the other sisters were not afraid of the intruders in the least. Their strength was firmly fixed on the Lord. However, the Saracens had a much different story to tell. The inexplicable vulnerability of St. Clare and her sisters was disarming (literally) and they were afraid that something bad might happen to them so they promptly fled the convent and Assisi and left their swords and daggers and shields behind. What an incredible story of the power of we possess when we surrender to the Lord.

Fast forward 800 years and we find another person who was highly influenced by St. Francis, Servant of God Carlo Acutis. He was only 15 years old when he died in 2006 and he will be Beautified next Saturday in Assisi on October 10th. Carlo was an example that courageous faith is not just for people who lived during the Middle Ages. God is working through ordinary individuals like you and me right now to draw others to Christ just like Carlo Acutis did.

He was born on May 3, 1991 in London, England but his family was Italian and he grew up in Milan. From the day he received his First Holy Communion, at the age of 7, he never missed a daily Mass despite the fact that his parents were non-practicing Catholics at the time. He always tried, either before or after Mass, to pause before the Tabernacle to adore the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. He had a special devotion to the Blessed Mother and prayed the rosary every day. He was known to stand up for those who were picked on at school and he spent his free time helping children and the elderly.

Now, this may sound very unusual for a modern-day youth, especially one whose parents were not very religious but Carlo Acutis was in many other ways a typical teenager. He loved playing soccer and computer games on his Playstation. He also enjoyed computer programming and film editing. He liked hanging out with friends and was knowledgeable about technology especially the internet. Carlo Acutis understood that the internet could be used as an “atomic bomb for good,” but he also believed that it could be used for bad, in ways that would diminish the human person. In the course of investigating for his cause for sainthood technicians searched his computer to see what sites he had visited and it was discovered that his use of the internet was only for a good purpose.

He created a website that contained a list of all the sites of Eucharistic miracles around the world. Carlo Acutis referred to the Eucharist as “my highway to heaven.” When asked what he wanted to be when he grew up Carlo would always say, “I want to be united with Jesus, **this is my plan of life.**” This is what he believed before he was diagnosed with an aggressive form of leukemia and this is what he said just before he died, “I am happy to die because I lived my life without wasting even a minute of it on anything displeasing to God.”

Carlo Acutis wanted to be buried in Assisi because he had a great devotion to St. Francis. Like St. Francis and St. Clare he gave his life completely to Christ. He found ways to communicate his love of Christ to everyone he met. In fact, his funeral was packed with people overflowing into the streets of Milan; well-dressed teenagers from Carlo’s Jesuit high school, homeless people and countless people of other faiths. These were people his parents never even knew Carlo had befriended on his way home from school every day. Carlo Acutis made a huge difference in many people’s lives during his short lifetime because of his love of Christ and now he will influence many, many more people for generations to come by his beatification and hopefully someday sainthood.

My brothers and sisters, on this feast of St. Francis let us be inspired by St. Clare and Servant of God Carlo Acutis and put nothing before Christ and let our unity to Christ and to his Church be **our plan of life** now and forever.

*Very Rev. William L. Novak, V.G.  
October 4, 2020*