



A Pastoral Letter

On the Pilgrim Path of the Shrewsbury Diocese

To be read at all Masses on Sunday 29th September 2024

My dear brothers and sisters,

I write at the end of a pilgrimage which brought several thousand people from across our Diocese to Saint Anthony's, Wythenshawe. What drew so many was the witness of a teenager, Blessed Carlo Acutis. A young man born in London, who grew up in Italy and died suddenly of leukaemia in 2006. Carlo told his parents that he was offering what he had to suffer for the Pope, the Church and *“to skip purgatory and go straight to Heaven”!* Pope Francis declared him among the Blessed in 2020 and sets his example before us. In 15 short years, Carlo reached the perfection of love for which you and I must still strive.

The pilgrimage of the relic of his heart reminded us once again that what speaks most eloquently to this and every generation, is the witness of holiness. Carlo described this as: *“Always to be united with Jesus, this is the programme of my life.”* And our society will be evangelised anew, as our land was first evangelised by the witness of saints, who allow the Gospel to be seen by their striving to draw closer and closer to Jesus Christ truly and powerfully present in His Eucharist. It is the same witness many wait to see in you and me! Speaking via a phone link, Blessed Carlo's mother reminded us holiness is the only worthwhile goal – namely being united with Christ now and for all eternity. Carlo expressed this with his wonderful directness when he said: *“You, too, can be a saint. But you need to want it with your whole heart, and, if you do not yet desire it, ask the Lord for it with insistence.”*

When I spoke to more than 500 of our young people in Wythenshawe, I noted that we often picture saints in times different to our own, so it's startling to find someone reaching the heights of holiness wearing trainers, liking Nutella and using the internet to good effect! A teenager so close to our time that Carlo Acutis is indistinguishable in dress and tastes from many who grew up in the 21st Century and points us now to the one goal of everlasting happiness. This helps us understand the hard words of the Gospel today in which Jesus urges us to let go of everything that prevents us finding the life and happiness which the saints now shareⁱ. And this led us to pray at the beginning of Mass, for an abundance of grace that we may hasten to attain the treasures of Heavenⁱⁱ.

Blessed Carlo tells us, *“The only thing we must really fear is sin ...”* and he calls us to go to Confession frequently; to come wholeheartedly to Mass and Holy Communion every Sunday and as often as we can on other days; and invites us to allow this Eucharistic Love to overflow into the details and duties of our lives, especially in concern for the salvation of souls and in care for the poorest and most vulnerable. Looking at the Tabernacle he asks us to reflect *“We are more fortunate than those who lived 2,000 years ago in contact with Jesus ... It is enough (for us) to visit the closest church!”* And he shares the secret of his own path to holiness using a vivid image: *“If we go out in the sun, we get a suntan ... but if we get in front of Jesus in the Eucharist, we become saints.”*

These simple, striking words of a young man ‘forever blessed’ struck me, when I saw our Shrewsbury Diocese in pilgrimage drawn from every background, age, and walk of life united in faith and prayer; confessing their sins and renewed in holiness and gathered to celebrate and adore the Most Holy Eucharist which Blessed Carlo described as: *“Truly the Heart of Jesus.”* This is how the Second Vatican Council pictured the Church on her pilgrim path, passing through dangers and difficulties, yet gifted with all the means of salvationⁱⁱⁱ. The same Council taught, we must now strive for the goal which the saints have reached, for: *“The Church in which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which by the grace of God we acquire holiness, will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven”^{iv}*. May it be so for us, who have been given more than 15 years to strive for this goal!

The days of pilgrimage to Wythenshawe brought us back to the heart of the Church’s life and mission; and Blessed Carlo’s heart pointed us to the one thing necessary^v. The Diocese has been gifted by the Bishop of Assisi with two relics of Blessed Carlo, one to remain in Wythenshawe and the other for the mission of our Eucharistic Shrine at Saint Joseph’s, Stockport. May the radiant witness of his short life encourage us; and may Blessed Carlo Acutis pray for us as we continue our earthly pilgrimage.

+ Mark

Bishop of Shrewsbury

ⁱ Cf. Mk. 9: 45-50

ⁱⁱ Cf. Collect for 26th Sunday of the Year

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Unitatis Redintegratio No 4

^{iv} Lumen Gentium No. 48

^v Cf. Lk. 10: 42