

Acutis' canonization news has devotees 'over the moon'

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



News that an Italian teen could soon be canonized — the first from the "millennial" generation — has enthralled his devotees in the U.S.

On May 23, Pope Francis formally recognized a second miracle attributed to the intercession of Blessed Carlo Acutis, clearing the way for him to be formally recognized as a saint of the Catholic Church.

Along with Acutis, the pope also advanced the sainthood causes of a group of Franciscan martyrs, six men and one woman in the same promulgation.

Acutis — who is credited with interceding for the 2022 healing of a head injury in a young Costa Rican woman — died of leukemia in 2006 at age 15, having lived a brief life of extraordinary holiness that was marked by a profound devotion to Christ and the Eucharist. Acutis' desire to foster awareness of the Blessed Sacrament, along with his formidable computer skills, led him to create a database of eucharistic miracles throughout the world.

The sunny-faced teen — who was born in London in 1991 and grew up in Milan, Italy — displayed an early attraction to the spiritual life, reciting the rosary and attending Mass daily, serving as a catechist, volunteering at a church soup kitchen and tutoring children with their homework. At the same time, Acutis was known for his enthusiasm for typical teenage interests, such as video games, pets, soccer and music.

"Blessed Carlo Acutis is an inspiration and intercessor for all young people, but especially for

those who are drifting away or alienated from the Church or who are skeptical about religion," Bishop Robert E. Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minn., chair of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, told OSV News. "He demonstrates that having a clear reference point in Jesus Christ opens up the possibilities of a joy-filled and creative mission, but also and most importantly imparts a holiness through which the meaning and purpose of life is revealed."

"Carlo really was a regular kid," said Michael Norton, president of the Malvern Retreat Center in Malvern, Pa., which is home to the Blessed Carlo Acutis Shrine and Center for Eucharistic Encounter.

The center, which is seeking to attain diocesan shrine status, contains a permanent exhibit featuring 100 Eucharistic miracles as well as a Blessed Carlo Reading Room and a permanent altar for group Eucharistic adoration during scheduled events.

In October 2023, the center hosted the teen's mother, Antonia Acutis, who shared her reflections on being the mother of a saint who speaks especially to the younger generation.

Norton told OSV News he is "over the moon" about Acutis' pending canonization — as is Malvern board member Mary Bea Damico, who was what Norton called the "visionary" for the Acutis center at Malvern.

The announcement of Acutis' impending sainthood also has thrilled Catholic schools named in his honor.

"We prayed this day would come but never dreamed it would arrive less than two years after opening Blessed Carlo Acutis Academy, an online, Catholic school for students in grades 5-12," located in the Diocese of Madison, Wis., said Michael Lancaster, diocesan superintendent of Catholic schools, in a statement to OSV News.

For Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic High School in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, the canonization's timing is especially ideal, since construction has only just begun and the name can be easily updated from "Blessed" to "Saint."

"We chose Blessed Carlo Acutis as the namesake for this school so that our students could easily see themselves living out their faith in this modern world," said Sandra Palazzo, board chair of Edmonton Catholic Schools, a publicly funded school division in Edmonton. "He was a shining example of sharing the love of God. We look forward to having the students of Edmonton Catholic Schools journey alongside Carlo Acutis on the path to sainthood."

Bishop Malone gives update on 'Shreveport martyrs' cause

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ORLANDO, Fla. — When five missionary priests of Brittany, France, volunteered to serve people suffering in Shreveport, La., they knew they were risking their lives.

Yet they sacrificed their own welfare during a pandemic to journey with the dying and bring the Eucharist to the faithful. Their names might not be familiar to the entire U.S. Church, but those in northwest Louisiana know the men as the "Shreveport martyrs."

"They demonstrated heroic charity during the third worst pandemic in U.S. history," said Bishop Francis I. Malone of Shreveport, who added the priests' example during the yellow fever epidemic of 1873 "resounds beyond the Catholic world," as the men ministered to the sick regardless of religious affiliation.

"Even in dark times and in dark places, human beings are spiritual beings who sacrifice themselves for humankind for the common good," he said.

Bishop Malone made those remarks June 15 during the U.S. bishops' spring plenary assembly at the Omni Championsgate in the southern part of the Diocese of Orlando. He, along with Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKI of Milwaukee, offered the consultation on the cause of the priests' beatification and canonization.

Fathers Jean Pierre, Jean Marie Biler, François Le Vézouët, Isidore Quémerais and Louis Marie Gergaud were all young men, ages 26 to 27, Bishop Malone said. They came to the United States as missionaries from France, and volunteered to serve the sick and dying of Shreveport from September through October of 1873. Yellow fever killed a quarter of the population in the area, including all five priests.

The prospect of death was never a secret to the men. They knew they could, and most likely would, die.

"Fathers Jean Pierre and Father Isidore were the first to volunteer," Bishop Malone said. "Father Isidore worked tirelessly until Sept. 15, when he collapsed and died, one week after his 26th birthday. Father Jean Pierre died the following day."

At those men's bedside was Father Biler, who gave them final sacraments. He cared for more than 900 sick and dying people. When he became infected and knew he was going to die, he telegraphed pleas for assistance. Father Gergaud, who was some 37 miles away, answered, as did Father Le Vézouët, who was in Natchitoches, La., some 76 miles away.

"When someone told Father Le Vézouët, 'You are going to your death,' Father Le Vézouët said, 'I believe it, it is the surest and shortest path to heaven,'" Bishop Malone recounted. "They all willingly entered a quarantined city to face horrible death."

In 1945, the year he died, Bishop Daniel F. Desmond of Alexandria, La., whose territory at the time included Shreveport, said, perhaps one day these sons of France could be found worthy to be included in the Church's calendar of saints. Perhaps fittingly, Bishop Malone officially opened the cause of canonization for the martyrs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After introducing the martyrs and their histories, the USCCB assembly floor was open for comments and questions from fellow bishops. Bishop Earl K. Fernandes of Columbus, Ohio, had known about the martyrs after reading the book "Shreveport Martyrs of 1873: The Surest Path to Heaven." He said the priests' service is especially a source of inspiration for priests during the Eucharistic Revival because they worked to provide the sacraments to a population others might not touch.

Bishop Joseph E. Strickland of Tyler, Texas, thanked Bishop Malone for taking up the canonization task. Since Tyler is just across the state border from Shreveport, Catholics of northeast Texas share the heritage of those in northwest Louisiana, he said. "This will be a great boost to the faith" of both communities along with the growing population of Catholics within the Bible Belt, he said.

Under the terms of the 2007 Vatican document "Sanctorum Mater," the diocesan bishop promoting a sainthood cause must consult at least with the regional bishops' conference on the advisability of pursuing the cause.

Cause opens for priests who sacrificed lives in epidemic

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Sainthood cause opened for five priests who ministered during 1873 epidemic in Shreveport

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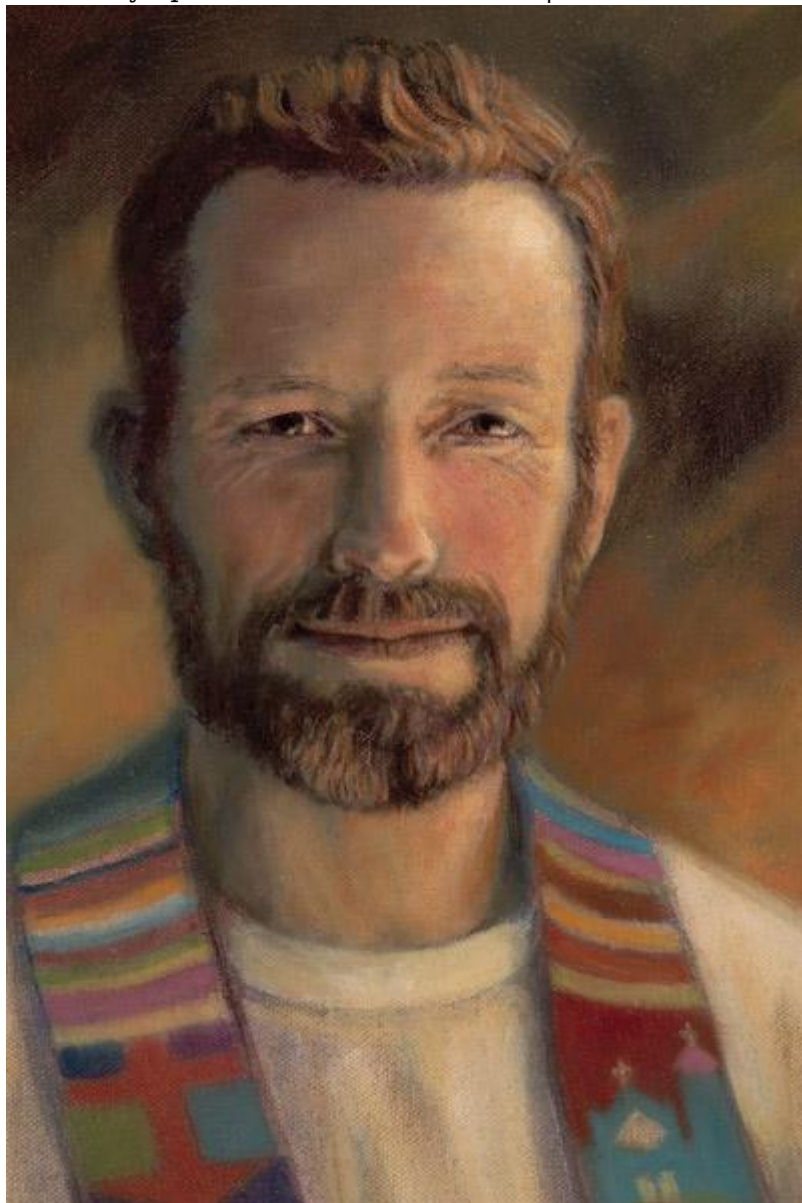
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Jesus is worth the sacrifice, no matter how high the price

written by Bishop Anthony B. Taylor |

I presided at the vigil Mass on Wednesday of this week and the Gospel reading was, quite fittingly, the parables in which Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a treasure buried in a field and a pearl of great price, both of which are worth sacrificing everything to obtain.

In today's Gospel of the rich fool — which happened to be the Gospel for my first Mass as a priest 36 years ago — we have the opposite scenario: a man who puts his trust in the things of this world. And here Jesus unpacks for us the difference between the true riches of the kingdom of God and the false riches of the kingdom of this world.

A fitting warning for all of us, especially a newly ordained priest and a message that has marked my ministry ever since. Today's Gospel of the rich fool starts with the younger of two brothers complaining that the older brother refuses to give him his share of their inheritance. The elder brother would rather leave the inheritance undivided — such joint ownership was highly esteemed in those days. The younger brother has other ideas though, and so he appeals to Jesus. Jesus for his part however, refuses to give a decision, primarily because he considered the possession of property to be irrelevant to the message of the coming of the kingdom that

he had come to proclaim — not evil, simply of no importance. What is important is our relationship with God — riches can affect that relationship, and it is this danger that Jesus is warning us about.

And so to make his point of how riches can harm our relationship with God, Jesus tells us the parable of the rich fool. There was a farmer whose land was so fertile that it produced more grain than his barns could hold. He became proud in his self-sufficiency and built even bigger silos for his grain and for all the riches he was able to buy with that grain. He felt more and more self-sufficient and saw himself as the self-made man — he got to where he was by his own hard work, rags to riches — he laid back plenty for a good retirement, looking forward to many years of the “good life” — eating, drinking, being merry.

Jesus calls this man a “fool,” why? He sounds to me like a responsible provider for his family, a man in control of his destiny. Why does Jesus call this man a fool? The reason this man is a fool is that he let the very riches that God had given him separate him from God. In his feelings of self-sufficiency, he counts his prosperity to be the result of his own hard work — in practice he denies God’s existence. In his planning for his future retirement, the “good life” that he thought lay before him, he forgot to take God — and those whom he could use his riches to help — into account and this blindness was due to the fact that he had made himself (not God or the needs of his neighbor) but himself the measure of all things.

There is an old proverb that said that “money is like sea-water, the more a person drinks, the thirstier he becomes. ” So long as a person centers his life on his own struggles for self-sufficiency and forgets those in need and the God who has made all this possible, his desire will always be to get more. This attitude, against which we all have to struggle, is the very reverse of Christianity.

And this is why the witness of Father Rother is so powerful to me. He was a priest of my home Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, and I met him only once when I was less than a year ordained and only two months before his death, but my life has been intertwined with his ever since. He had served our mission parish in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, for 13 years and remained there during their darkest days. He said the shepherd cannot run when the wolf threatens the flock. In time, 16 of his catechists and around 300 of his parishioners were killed by paramilitary death squads sponsored by the Guatemalan military and he knew that they might well come for him too, but he remained and died a brutal death.

His funeral in Oklahoma City fell on Aug. 3, which was coincidentally the first anniversary of my first Mass. And then a few months later I received into my rectory at Sacred Heart Parish in Oklahoma City the only eyewitness to the events of Father Rother’s death. He stayed with me until I found a family in the parish with whom he could live. Oklahoma City continued to staff the parish there after his death and I visited the parish there three times in the 1980s. Later I was put in charge of his cause of canonization and interviewed many people in Guatemala regarding his life starting in 2007.

I would be happy to share with you his whole story, but it would be far too long for a homily even for charismatics who say they like long homilies. But suffice it to say that from all of this, I think I know Father Rother pretty well, and I can tell you that, using the images in today’s Gospel compared to last Wednesday’s Gospel, Father Rother was no rich fool. Instead, he found his treasure buried in a field by Lake Atitlán and he sold everything he had to buy that field. He had been searching for a fine pearl and when he found it here in Guatemala; he gave

everything he had in order to acquire it. Jesus was that great treasure and it was in the Jesus that he encountered in Guatemala that he found his role in God's plan. He gave his heart to Jesus and to the people entrusted to his care and they gave their hearts to him.

And this is how it must be for any of us who truly wants to share the life of the kingdom of God regarding which Jesus makes two points: 1) the kingdom is greater than we could possibly imagine — a treasure worth everything we have, a pearl worth sacrificing everything to acquire, everything that rich fool was stockpiling in his barns, and 2) to share in this kingdom, we have to respond with all our heart and soul, with everything we have and are.

For Father Rother this meant leaving his family and friends, everything that was familiar and coming to Guatemala. In Father Rother's mind, his parishioners were a treasure worth dying for. Which is another way of saying that for him, Jesus — the kingdom of God — was a treasure worth dying for. As it also should be for us even though for you and me this may mean something else. The sacrificial love with which I try to live my vocation as a priest and bishop, the sacrificial love with which you try to live your vocation as parents raising children — and some of you grandparents raising children — the sacrificial love with which young people consider what role God has for them in his plan. But in every case it means entering into a deep relationship with Jesus and finding in him, and in the kingdom he came to establish, the greatest treasure in our life. And then placing ourselves fully into his hands.

Thirty five years ago the Church was enduring severe persecution. More than a dozen priests were killed in Guatemala, many by death squads like Father Rother, as were hundreds of catechists and thousands of simple people who were innocent victims of the violence of those days. At that time there were those who sought to find treasure in the bloody field of war against the government and others in the bloody field of military repression and even genocide, but there was no treasure to be found in those fields, only hatred, fear and destruction. The only treasure available is in the field of justice and peace, in the field of respect and mercy, in the field of forgiveness, reconciliation and — if necessary — non-violent resistance to evil.

In other words, the only treasure available is in the field of the kingdom of God, for which Father Rother gave his life. This kingdom is greater than we could possibly imagine and certainly greater than any human government even under the best of circumstances. And it is a treasure that — like Father Rother — we too must be willing to sacrifice everything to acquire.

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Miracle recognized to declare Mother Teresa a saint

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



Decree signed Dec. 17 by pope for Blessed Teresa, three other saint causes