

The following is the text of the homily given by Bishop Fintan Gavin at the Church of St Peter's and St Paul's on the occasion of the 98th Cork Eucharistic Procession on May 26th 2024

I was fortunate to travel to Lisbon in August last year for World Youth Day together with 40 young people from our diocese. It was a very powerful experience for all of us and we each have our own special memories. Among my own memories was a powerful moment on the Saturday evening when all one and a half million young people gathered with Pope Francis for a prayer vigil in Campo de Gracia. During that prayer vigil there was a time of eucharistic adoration. The image still stays with me - of watching a million and a half young people in silent adoration – there was a profound silence descended on the gathering as we all faced the blessed sacrament in prayer. A profound act of faith.



Bishop Fintan Gavin

One of the 13 patrons of World Youth Day last year was Blessed Carlo Acutis, who has been declared blessed — or soon to be saint. Although I had heard of him it was through World Youth Day and a subsequent visit to Assisi that I really came to know him better. His incorrupt body lies in a Church in Assisi.

Born in London in 1991 to Italian parents, who later moved back to Milan, he grew up as any ordinary boy with friends, he joked and had fun like any other boy, he played sport, loved animals, played the saxophone and had a sweet tooth. He was particularly gifted with technology and computers and went on to create a website to record different eucharistic miracles.

Along with that side everybody saw and experienced was a deeper and more reflective side, a spiritual aspect of his life, well beyond his years. They say that even at the age of 4 years (of age) Carlo would not pass in front of a Church without asking to enter and blow kisses to Jesus.

It is said that one of the most significant moments in his early life was when he was 7 years of age he asked boldly to receive First Holy Communion – that was younger than the normal age in Italy and required special permission. From there his love for the eucharist deepened and grew. His life was short and he died of leukaemia at the age of 15 years.

But during that short life he lived a profound spiritual life.

He said 'always be united to Jesus, this is the programme of my life'. To live with Jesus, for Jesus and in Jesus is the simple and achievable roadmap that he sets out for us.

One of the ways Carlo sustained his relationship with Jesus was his frequent reception of the Eucharist. Carlo strove to participate in the Mass every day. With a smiling confidence he declared, 'You go straight to heaven if you participate in the mass everyday'.

The reason was simple. The foundation for holiness is a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus.

'The more we receive the Eucharist, the more we will become like Jesus'. For Carlo this relationship was nurtured most especially by his belief in the Real Presence of the Lord in the Eucharist.

Carlo's relationship with Jesus in the mass was deepened in Eucharistic Adoration – a short time before and after mass and for longer periods when he could. For Carlo, his relationship with Jesus was nurtured in extended periods of time praying before the Blessed sacrament.

Carlo understood that prayer is essential for growing in intimacy with Jesus:

'To him I can always confide something, I can also complain, question him about his silence and tell him what I do not understand. And then, within me, find a word that he sends me; a moment of the gospel that fills me with conviction and certainty'.

Carlo's friendship with Jesus also grew. Eucharistic Adoration was fundamental in Carlo's journey to be a saint.

"by standing before the eucharistic Christ, we become holy." Turning one's gaze towards Jesus was a practice Carlo followed with constancy.

I share something of the story of Carlos Acutis, particularly as it relates to the eucharist because his witness is an invitation addressed to all of us and in a particular way to our young people to put Christ in the eucharist at the centre of our lives.

As we gather in procession today celebrating Corpus Christi – the body of Christ we reflect on the place of the eucharist in our lives.

By taking the Blessed Sacrament in procession through the streets of our city we bring the presence of Jesus onto our streets we are challenged as individuals and as a community to do three things:-

Build Communion - our Friendship with Jesus

We are told many times in the gospels that Jesus spent the night in prayer to God. Jesus withdrew from the busyness of his world to spend time in prayer - in communion with God. Challenged by Jesus example and that of Carlo Acutis we are challenged to do the same.

In the busyness of our world, with all its demands on our time and all the distractions, all its pressures Jesus is inviting you to encounter him in silence, in solitude, especially in his eucharistic presence.

We can do that in a particularly privileged way through prayer before the blessed sacrament or Adoration. Recently we introduced 24/7 adoration here in this Church in partnership with St Mary's Popes Quay. It's a real witness and blessing to our city and diocese – perhaps you might consider committing to being part of this. Volunteers will be outside afterwards. You can chat to them and if you are ready volunteer.

So today I encourage you to deepen your friendship with Jesus – deepen your communion – embrace solitude and allow Jesus, particularly present in the eucharist to transform your life.

Build Community, Unity – Friendship with others

Jesus always formed community. We gather as people of faith from the various parishes here in the city and beyond with so many of the new communities of faith originally from different parts of the world who share the same catholic faith who have made their home here. We are making an important statement about our identity as we adore and offer praise to Jesus through his presence as the Body of Christ we are at the same time challenged to become that body of Christ in our world, we are called to be a sign of welcome and unity.

All of us desire or crave, belonging, crave community it's in our DNA. As Christians we are called to live and express our faith with others. It's never in isolation, it's never just about me.

Commissioning – friendship with the stranger, the marginalized – Mission

Our Christian faith, our encounter with Christ, our life and support in the Christian community must always lead us out of ourselves to be of service to others, especially those in most need. Our Christian faith isn't private we need to witness to it. We need to put it into practice through our life. We are called to build God's kingdom, of love, peace and joy, justice especially for those who are excluded or marginalized. Today God is inviting us to be his hands in building a better world.

And so we gather in friendship with Jesus, strengthening our bonds though we come from so many different places, and committing together to make Cork and all the world a better place because we care with our faith.

Today we celebrate the very essence of who we are as the priests, deacons, religious and people of God in the diocese of Cork and Ross. This is not something we keep hidden but something we respectfully bring to the streets to celebrate and witness to as we build communion with Jesus, community with one another and accept the invitation to be commissioned to share Christ with one another especially the most marginalised.

✠ Fintan Gavin
Bishop of Cork and Ross