

## THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS: THE FAMILY AS THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

While praying at the Church of **San Damiano in Assisi**, where the famed crucifix spoke to Saint Francis— “Go, rebuild my church,” I noticed a family arrive one by one to pray. The first to enter the chapel was a young lad sporting a **Trinity** sweatshirt. Hmmn, I wonder if that is the same Trinity School in Eagan? (I am too easily distracted in prayer!!) It could have been a college sweatshirt, or the Trinity in South Bend, Indiana. I was most impressed that upon entering the chapel, he immediately **genuflected**, then knelt down to pray, absent anyone’s promptings. Later, I encountered the family in a different room in the monastery. I greeted them, asking where they were from. “Minnesota,” said the father. Bingo! “So am I,” came my reply. To which the mother added, “Fr. Ubel?” My **cover** was **blown**. She elaborated: “I **thought** that was you, but it was difficult to tell.” (At the time of this trip, Italy still required all people to be masked.) “I told my husband that if I hear that priest speaking English, I’ll ask him.”

As it turns out, the family of six belongs to **St. Joseph’s** in West St. Paul and had attended various Cathedral liturgies. Their college-aged daughter is enjoying her semester abroad with **UST’s Catholic Studies** program. I later texted Fr. Creagan with a picture— “Look who I met!” He rather quickly responded— “Yes, they are great parishioners.” I ended up celebrating Mass for the family at the retreat center where I was staying, and in return they treated me to dinner afterwards at my favorite Assisi restaurant! A more joyous, respectful, and supportive family would be difficult to imagine. It reminded me just how vital a strong family life is in the Church and that we pastors have a solemn duty to be as supportive of you as you are of us! Family life is challenging. It is neither easy— nor inexpensive— for a family of six to travel to Italy. And yet, making pilgrimage to the holy sites of Assisi was a must-see for this family.

A strong Catholic family life is **consistent** with leading daily lives that are immersed in school and work. It is consistent with laughter, telling funny stories and in general, sharing in life’s joys and even struggles. Sanctity is for us everyday people! At dinner, I helped young Nathan order from the menu by helping him pronounce in Italian the words of his desired **pork** entree. What he received instead however, was pasta and **octopus!** (Cinghiale isn’t even close to polpo!) My Italian couldn’t have slipped **that much!** I made up for it by procuring **six tickets** to the papal Mass at St. Peter’s Basilica on Divine Mercy Sunday, knowing that they had desired to attend. They waved to me in the procession; it filled my heart with joy. It was a “once in a lifetime” family trip and I was honored to play even a tiny part. Holiness starts at home, the Domestic Church!

I have visited many Italian churches in which the mortal remains of saints are interred beneath an altar. Still other important people of the day are interred beneath faded stones on the floor. Even if the names were not so faded by years of being walked upon, their names would likely mean little to us, their identities long since forgotten through the passage of time. But on my recent mini retreat in Assisi (prior to attending a conference in Rome), I venerated the mortal remains of **Blessed Carlo Acutis**, a London born Italian native who died in 2006 at the **age of fifteen** from leukemia. Located in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Assisi, adjacent to the tomb is a photo of Blessed Carlo—backpack slung over his shoulder— just like any typical teenager. He came from a family that had stopped attending Church regularly. Carlo was known to even “**drag**” his parents to Church, making his sanctity even more amazing.

Carlos’ devotion to the Eucharist pre-dated any diagnosis of a life-threatening disease. Dr. Andrea Biondi and Dr. Mòmcilo Jankovic treated Acutis at St. Gerald Hospital. They said: “Carlo was like

a meteor with a quick passage through our ward; **leukemia** took him away before we could **get to know him** even a little. However, his sweet eyes remain engrained [in our memories]. His gaze was full of attention ... of courage, of love, of strong empathy.” He built websites to inform others about Eucharistic miracles and Marian apparitions around the world. On his website, he told people, “The more often we receive the Eucharist, the more we will become like Jesus, so that on this earth we will have a **foretaste** of heaven.”

Many years ago, Holy Cross priest Fr. Patrick Peyton, known as the “**Rosary Priest**” was fond of saying “The family that prays together, stays together.” As of 2017, he is now **Venerable Patrick Peyton**, having cleared the first hurdle towards canonization. Prayer is not magic and plenty of families who pray still have troubles. However, those troubles are greatly minimized through an active family life of prayer. Beginning with a commitment to eat dinner together nightly, saying grace, attending Mass as an entire family whenever possible, and daily nighttime prayers- these are all effective ways to develop an identity as a Catholic family. On Mother’s Day, I take this opportunity to assure all mothers of my unfailing support for their role in fostering a strong family life. From what I have seen, I have **great hope** for Catholic family life.

- The **American Medical Association** was founded **175 years** ago today– May 7, 1847. I have tremendous respect for medical doctors, and for years intended to follow in my father’s footsteps. God had other plans! However, I do regret that the Hippocratic Oath is neither stressed in the same way, nor spoken with the same words that it was previously. Its prohibition from participating in an abortion was prophetic and could be again, especially with a looming Supreme Court decision on the docket.
- As I **predicted** several weeks ago, a summit between the Pope and **Patriarch** of Moscow **will not** take place as earlier envisioned. That was the right decision. The Russian patriarch’s statements and actions in these past two months have clearly signaled that he has no intention of pushing back on Russia’s invasion– in fact, one could infer he has effectively given his blessing.
- Congratulations to our recent 1st Communicants and newly Confirmed. Several parishioner children are enrolled in Catholic schools, at which they received those same sacraments. I am generous with **permission** for parishioners to celebrate these sacraments with their **classmates**, especially since they are prepared during the school day. While they may not have received those sacraments here at the Cathedral, they too deserve recognition!
- I am not a **Twitter** user, but I will say that I have been extremely concerned at how many accounts have been **suspended** because individuals wrote things that Twitter’s censors find inappropriate. Some of these suspended users have merely expressed traditional Catholic teaching in moral areas. And for this, they are silenced? Free speech isn’t free! It is an equal opportunity offender!
- Just out–the implications of the U.S. Supreme Court draft leak on the Dobbs case are huge! More to follow.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector