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Fifth grade students at St. John Berchmans Elementary School fill out postcard invitations to t

Fifth grade students at St. John Berchmans Elementary School, which is part of Blessed Carlo Acutis Parish in Chicago, fill out postcard invitations to the Sept. 7 Mass at their parish to commemorate the blessed's canonization in Rome, Sept. 3. (OSV News/Simone Orendain)



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A Chicago parish named for Blessed Carlo Acutis is hosting multiple events related to the first millennial to become a saint ahead of his canonization Sunday, Sept. 7.

As part of "Carlo Fest," the parish on Chicago's North Side started a novena set to end on the day of his canonization, and the parish school is holding a soccer shootout in honor of his favorite sport coupled with a screening of "Roadmap to Reality," a movie about Blessed Carlo's life. Other events include a Blessed Carlo-focused school Mass; a meet-and-greet between the parish school's student mentors and student mentees in the "Faith Partners" program where older students share

Jesus' teachings with younger ones.

The events culminate in a Mass Sept. 7, during which two bronze busts of Blessed Carlo will be blessed for installation at the parish's two church buildings.

On Sept. 3 a school Mass for students of the parish elementary school highlighted the young blessed's life and showcased the children's knowledge of their parish patron — and soon-to-be saint.

In his homily for the Mass, celebrated at the St. John Berchmans church building, Resurrectionist Fr. Ed Howe, pastor, noted the date was also the feast of St. Gregory the Great. That saint, from a much earlier era, along with Blessed Carlo did much in their lifetimes to "build up the kingdom of God," Howe said.

Blessed Carlo Acutis

Blessed Carlo Acutis is pictured in an undated photo. He will be canonized in Rome Sunday, Sept. 7. (OSV News/Courtesy Sainthood Cause of Carlo Acutis)

Students among the 300 first through eighth graders eagerly raised their hands to answer questions about how Blessed Carlo helped to build up the kingdom Howe spoke of.

At the foot of the altar stairs to the left was the well-recognized portrait of the smiling Blessed Carlo behind a small table bearing a ring of pink and orange flowers with a white backpack, a laptop and a soccer ball on the floor below. Howe took items out of the backpack, a representation of the blessed's own backpack, whose straps can be seen on the portrait.

"What's this? Why would he have a blanket (in his backpack)?" asked the parish pastor.

A student answered, "To give to the poor."

That was a reference to the well-off boy's care and concern for the homeless or those who lived in poverty, whom he encountered on the streets.

After the Mass, Howe told OSV News that Blessed Carlo is part of the school's curriculum.

"Our children in the school, on an ongoing basis, they've learned a lot about Carlo Acutis in the classroom, by doing activities and at school masses, with all kinds of other things" including handing all teachers a book about Carlo Acutis and mentioning some of the boy's quotes in relation to Jesus during Sunday homilies, he said.

"Not me but God" is one of the quotes that Howe said clearly illustrated the teen's life of humility and a deep desire to turn others' attention to the Lord.

Carlo Acutis, the unlikely first millennial saint, inspires a new generation of Catholics

Blessed Carlo died of leukemia in 2006 at age 15. With a lifelong devotion to the Eucharist, by the time of his death, Blessed Carlo had documented more than 150 Eucharistic miracles from around the world on a website he designed and began coding when he was 11. He was an avid soccer player and enjoyed spending time with friends, traveling or making videos with them, sometimes including his pets.

After the Mass, students took turns by grade level, writing out invitations to the Sunday Mass at their parish marking the blessed's canonization.

Peter Alfirebich, an eighth grader at St. John Berchmans School who attended the Mass, told OSV News he saw himself in Blessed Carlo.

"He's a great model because he does a lot of the stuff we do. But … he went to church every day. Like, he was so in the faith, which is a cool thing," said Peter, who expressed a desire to model his faith life on the daily Massgoer.

"He makes me want to go (to church) more, for sure," he explained, saying that church life at his parish is a big community "and it's awesome to be a part of."

> 'A lot of the things Carlo [Acutis] did are the things that kids do today … he gives us an example of just great Christian living or just great living as a human being.'
> —Fr. Ed Howe
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Fifth grader Nora Ciapciak was also struck by Blessed Carlo's faith, particularly his eucharistic devotion. She called his focus on the Eucharist, having his first

Communion at an early age (7, with special permission from the bishop in Milan, his hometown), correcting others to shorten their time playing video games and his life plan of being always close to Jesus, "magical."

Nora, 10, said, "He was a great influence for kids our age, because he was our age" and added she "could do more" to increase her own devotion to the Eucharist and to live more like the blessed. She said she tries to invite other children who do not regularly go to Mass to her parish, and on some occasions, like on a Sunday after a sleepover, she has some success.

Danny Roket told OSV News he wanted to do more for the poor so that he could "spread kindness and love" which were some of the "very amazing things" Blessed Carlo demonstrated in his young life.

He explained, "I usually help with packing of the lunches for the poor. … We did that last year and also, a couple years ago, we did it for a couple years straight. We helped by bringing bagged lunches to the poor around our neighborhood."

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As part of the upcoming Sunday Mass in honor of Blessed Carlo's canonization, Howe will bless two bronze busts of the blessed that were created by Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz, who has made multiple religious pieces for the church. The busts are fashioned after the live sculpture he made of Blessed Carlo during the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis in July 2024.

Howe said the artist reached out to him in October 2024 and offered to give the parish the work, since it was the only one (so far) named after Blessed Carlo Acutis. He said they agreed to have a second one and have them both cast in bronze. The parish paid $7,000 apiece for the two bronze castings, with no other costs involved, he said.

Howe extended an invitation to the Chicago Mass to everyone and to "anyone who can't go to Rome" to make the canonization, to come and learn about a saint that "is very relatable today."

"A lot of the things Carlo did are the things that kids do today, with video games and traveling and backpacking and everything like that. … he gives us an example of just great Christian living or just great living as a human being," he said.