
Carlo Acutis: the greatest grace we can receive through this young boy

In the fable "The Emperor's New Clothes", that we all know, it takes a child to make everyone admit that the king is naked, although it was obvious to everyone. Blessed Charles Acutis was no longer a child when he left this world to be embraced by the Father. He was a teenager, in other words he was at an even more critical and peculiar age than that of a child, an age of transformations and protests, provocations and inner and outer revolutions - and today he may be the one, simply by his existence surrounded by an anomalous Nike-clad glory, who shouts that "the king is naked", that is, that the hagiographic terminology used for too long to idealize (and distance) the Saints no longer makes sense, and even ends up being grotesque. Indeed, a Saint like Luigi Gonzaga, who in fact was ironic and determined, who would mock Saint Ignatius of Loyola (who loved him like a son), mimicking his limping before his frightened companions while giving his life to cure the sick, might today be distorted; his figure could be watered down, because he lived five hundred years ago - but not Carlo Acutis: he died in 2006, and this is off-key. Yet it is not seen as off-key by those who seek nothing more than consolidated and reassuring paths in the Catholic faith: elderly people having inherited a certain idea of Catholicism, characterized by a peculiar form of devotionism and sentimentality, which is what they are looking for. That form of religiosity has proved to be incapable of bringing the new generations closer to the Gospel. Yet many deem it appropriate because they feel that in this way they can continue along the "beaten track" - only to say that "today's youths don't believe in anything anymore."

The greatest grace that Carlo can accomplish for the Church today is a critical reflection on our way of communicating the experience of God.

All too often the beginning is confused with the end, and the masses are immediately confronted with just what, in a person's own experience of the faith (even of a Saint), is at the end, at its culmination. The outcome is misunderstanding, (or admiration, which is the same), and a missed opportunity. Rather than telling teenagers that someone like them has become a Saint by recounting his personal story, his family background, circumstances these youths may identify with, he is described through his daily Eucharistic adoration and the rosary prayer. For too long now, our way of expressing ourselves has neglected the initial, baptismal process of the faith: we start from the problematic nature of our own origin and, through a gradual journey, we arrive at the encounter with Christ in the Eucharist, at the mystical experience. *We should ask ourselves if starting from the end, from what is to be internally assimilated step by step, reflects an underlying anxiety to reassure ourselves about our own beliefs, thereby reaffirming them forcefully.* One thing is certain: while on the one hand this way of expressing the faith has distanced young people from authentic spirituality, replaced by a trivial version of flamboyant and flaunted philanthropy, on the other, by describing the Saints as a someone from outer space, we reach the point of spiritual docetism, that is to say, the denial of the human form replaced by an (allegedly) divine form that in fact nullifies the Incarnation. Let it suffice to Google the photoshopped images of this boy with airbrushed folded hands, haloes, hearts, etc.. Anything will do if it serves to deny that the divine radiates in the human form, in the ordinary, and that Carlo was spiritually fecund precisely because he was a normal boy, without beams or haloes, but full of sincere (and adolescent) enthusiasm for God and his wonders. I would like to share a personal story related to the denial of normality. When I showed my mother the photos of Blessed Carlo Acutis on display for his beatification, she, a simple and practical woman, commented: "That poor mother...". To which I, as if insulted in the official devotion, replied: "But Mother, she is the mother of a Blessed One, she will undoubtedly be full of Paschal joy!" *But I then realized that my mother was speaking as a mother, I was speaking as a priest, and that maybe she knew better than I*

do how a mother feels when she sees the body of her son who died fourteen years ago. I also remembered that in my church there is a heart-rending statue of Our Lady of Sorrows, and that in our faith grief and mourning are just as much a part of our faith as joy and consolation, because they are part of the human form, and that removing something from a human event, means moving towards docetism, which fears the dirty and plagued flesh, and only wants a radiant and luminous spirit.

Seeing the body of Blessed Carlo Acutis moved me deeply. In those slender limbs dressed as one of the many boys in my parish groups I saw each one of them, and how would I feel if it had happened to one of them. And in particular I saw F., who died at the same age as Carlo and was buried dressed in clothes very similar to his, and what pain it had been to see him there where a young man should never be: in a coffin. And yet this is the true secret of the Saints: you or anyone who resemble them - one way or the other - can see their life story in theirs and hope that the end, the goal, will be similar. Hence we must not water them down into reassuring forms of devotion, but always remind ourselves, and remind the young generations, that the Saints are, quite simply, people like us, who, however, compared to us, or at least most of us, had greater faith in the love of the Father. And this is no small thing Blessed Carlo Acutis, grant for us the grace to be able to genuinely and fruitfully communicate the beautiful and awe-inspiring experience of the faith to the new generations. Blessed Carlo Acutis, grant for us the grace to know how to constantly renew ourselves in spirit, to wisely perceive the present time in which God acts. Blessed Charles Acutis, pray for us.

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