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Cardinal Stephen visits Chinese Catholic community in the UK

HONG KONG (SE): In a spirit of pastoral care and unity, Cardinal Stephen Chow, S.J., bishop of Hong Kong, made a pastoral visit to Manchester, the United Kingdom, on July 14 to support and encourage the city's growing Chinese-speaking Catholic community. The visit brought together faithful from across Northwest England and other parts of the UK, reaffirming their shared mission in faith and communion.

The highlight of the visit was a Thanksgiving Mass celebrated by Cardinal Stephen at St. Patrick's Church in Collyhurst, concelebrated by Bishop John Arnold of the Diocese of Salford, who had previously visited Hong Kong in 2023 to explore pastoral collaboration for the growing number of Hong Kong migrants.

Concelebrants also included Father Philip Sumner, chaplain to the Greater Manchester Chinese Catholic community; Canon Paul Daly, parish priest of St. Patrick's; Canon Daniel McHugh of the Diocese of Birmingham; and Father Martin Collins of St. Mary's Church, Manchester.

Cardinal Stephen also heard confessions and met members of Manchester's Chinese-speaking Catholic community alongside representatives from similar communities in Liverpool, Warrington, and Scotland.

Francis Law and Savio Chan, convenor and vice convenor of the Hong Kong Catholic Migrants Pastoral Coordination Group set up last July, also took part in the meeting.

The dinner gathering which followed provided a space for fellowship, mutual support, and deepening bonds.

In his Cantonese homily, Cardinal Stephen offered words of hope and encouragement, acknowledging the challenges and opportunities of starting anew in a foreign land. "Everyone here has a fresh start. God is with you as you seek a spirit of



The Mass on July 14, celebrated in Cantonese and English, was attended by nearly 200 people from different areas in the UK.

unity and togetherness—and that is the greatest blessing," he said.

He emphasised that the Church's mission today is to bear witness to unity in plurality, where people from various backgrounds gather to proclaim a shared faith.

The cardinal also spoke about the role of empathy in communication. "True dialogue does not mean agreement in everything," he said, "but cultivating a heart of empathy that leads to mutual understanding."

He noted that he has sometimes been categorised as "pro-China" or "pro-Beijing" due to certain interactions, yet he believes such misunderstanding opens space for listening and bridge-building.

"As Hong Kong people, we can be a bridge. We need to engage with empathy—not with mockery or hostility—and we also

'As Hong Kong people, we can be a bridge. We need to engage with empathy—not with mockery or hostility—and we also hope others will try to understand us'

hope others will try to understand us," the cardinal added.

He stressed that such engagement does not compromise core Christian values: "The Church must always uphold its boundaries of faith. The bottom line is not to be crossed."

Cardinal Stephen also highlighted the *Light Up Fund*—a Church initiative working with

Hong Kong's Correctional Services Department to accompany and support young people who were imprisoned. The cardinal presented the project as an example of how communication and compassion can lead to healing and renewal, even in complex circumstances.

A growing, faithful community

Speaking with the *Sunday Examiner*, Li Pui-wai McNicholls, coordinator of the Manchester Chinese-speaking Catholic community, shared her gratitude. "The cardinal's visit has brought great joy. Many were eager to participate and volunteered their time to prepare for this special day. I am truly thankful for his presence."

Father Sumner, who has long ministered to the community, said the visit was a tremendous

privilege and evidence of Cardinal Stephen's ongoing concern for Hong Kong migrants.

In November 2023, the cardinal had assigned Paris Foreign Missions Father Bruno Lepeu, to England for six months to assess the pastoral needs of Hong Kong Catholics settled in Manchester and nearby areas.

Over the past three years, the community has grown significantly—from just 35 attendees to more than 250 regularly attending Mass every second Sunday.

The 73-year-old Father Sumner expressed concern for the future. "I am hoping for a Cantonese-speaking priest from Hong Kong to join us and help support this growing community," he said.

He shared his own journey in the ministry, which began after the retirement of Father Zhang Jingxian, a Mandarin-speaking priest who had served the community from 1991 to 1997.

Feeling it would be unfair to continue Mass entirely in English, Father Sumner took it upon himself to learn parts of the liturgy in Cantonese using romanised text and audio guides.

"My Cantonese hasn't improved much over the years," he said humbly, "but the community has always been incredibly appreciative."

Yet the challenges remain. Many priests, including Father Sumner, attempt to celebrate parts of the Mass in Cantonese, but face difficulties when it comes to hearing confessions or providing deeper spiritual accompaniment. The need for Cantonese-speaking clergy in the UK is increasingly urgent.

Cardinal Stephen's visit, rooted in pastoral love and missionary hope, served as a sign of solidarity from the Diocese of Hong Kong to Hong Kong Catholics abroad—reaffirming their identity, unity, and ongoing journey of faith.

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Caritas Charity TV Show unites Hong Kong in community support



Singers and students showcased surprise collaborations and fresh attempts, all aimed at making a meaningful contribution to charity during the show. Photo: supplied

HONG KONG (SE): The Caritas Charity TV Show, organised by the Friends of Caritas, was held on July 5 at the studios of Television Broadcasts Limited [TVB] in Tseung Kwan O. The annual event brought together community leaders, educators, and entertainers in a celebration of solidarity and hope with a special focus this year on the transformative power of education.

Presiding over the event were several distinguished guests, including Dr. Ko Wing-man, member of the Executive Council; Cardinal Stephen Chow, S.J., bishop of Hong Kong; Joseph Lee Chung-tak, chairperson of the Wofoo Foundation and of the show's preparation committee; Jimmy Jim Wai-ki, chairperson of the Caritas Fundraising Committee and senior business director of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China [Asia]; Theresa Ng Choi-yuk, chairperson of Friends of Caritas; and Andrew Chan Tak-kuen, the organisation's advisor. Their presence underscored a shared commitment to advancing Car-

tas' mission of service to the community.

This year's theme, centred on education, highlighted the crucial role Caritas plays in making learning accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Through moving real-life stories of Caritas beneficiaries, the programme demonstrated how guidance, support, and inclusive education can unlock human potential and empower individuals to contribute positively to society.

Among the institutions featured were Caritas Nursery School-Yau Tong; Caritas Ma On Shan Secondary School; Caritas Mother Teresa School, which serves students with emotional and behavioural challenges; and Caritas Lok Mo Integrated Vocational Training Centre, which provides specialised vocational training for individuals with disabilities.

The evening also featured uplifting performances by students from the Caritas Fanning Chan Chun Ha Secondary School choir and the Caritas St. Joseph Secondary School dance

group. A highlight of the evening was a fashion show curated by acclaimed designer, Janko Lam, a graduate of Caritas Bianchi College of Careers. Her collection featured over 10 elegant ensembles that seamlessly blended traditional elements with modern style, celebrating both cultural heritage and creative talent.

The entertainment segment included performances by 40 popular local artists, including renowned singer, Agnes Chan Mei-ling. The musical direction of the show was helmed by esteemed composer and producer, Chiu Tsang-hei, adding further prestige to the evening.

To facilitate public participation, the event featured 88 donation hotlines, generously sponsored by Make The Right Call. In addition, various donation channels and corporate matching schemes remain open until September, inviting the public to extend their support to the vulnerable and underserved in society.

The Caritas Charity TV Show once again stood as a testament to how compassion, education, and community collaboration can create meaningful change and offer hope to those in need.



**Brother Li professing his vows before
Friar Bonaventura Lin.** Photo: supplied

Franciscan Brother Francesco Li professes solemn vows

HONG KONG (SE): In a joyful and solemn celebration on July 1, Brother Francesco Li professed his perpetual vows as a member of the Order of Friars Minor [OFM], committing himself for life to the Franciscan way of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The profession took place at St. Bonaventure Church in Tsz Wan Shan, witnessed by Friar Bonaventura Lin, OFM, provincial minister of the BVM Queen of China Province, along with fellow friars, family, friends, and members of the faithful.

The solemn profession marks Brother Li's full incorporation into the Franciscan order, a community inspired by the gospel witness of St. Francis of Assisi. Brother Li pledged to live his life in total consecration to God in the spirit of the Franciscan charism.

During the celebration, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chishing, himself a Franciscan, delivered the homily, reflecting on the significance of faith in life's decisions—both large and small. Drawing from the life of St. Francis, he noted that even the saint initially misunderstood God's call as a literal command to rebuild church buildings. Only later did he grasp the deeper spiritual call to rebuild the Church through a life of poverty, service, and love.

Bishop Ha encouraged young people to remain open to God's invitation and to enter into a relationship with Christ that brings meaning, mission, and joy. "The call of God," he said, "is not merely words, but a call to lifelong commitment—for each person and for the Church."

In his message of thanksgiving, Brother Li expressed deep gratitude to all who supported his journey. "We gather here today to honour Jesus Christ, who showed us the meaning of love through his total self-giving," he said.

He thanked God for the grace that gives his life purpose and offered heartfelt appreciation to his family, mentors, and friends—both present and absent—who helped guide his path. He acknowledged the significant roles of clergy, religious, and laypeople in his discernment and invited all to continue walking together on the path of faith. He also offered words of encouragement to young men discerning a vocation, urging them to remain attentive to God's call.

Born into a Catholic family, Brother Li was baptised as a child and grew up in St. Benedict Parish, Shatin, where he was actively involved in liturgical ministries and sacred music. While studying at Immaculate Heart of Mary College, he joined the Franciscan Youth, where he felt increasingly drawn to the gospel-centred life of St. Francis.

After experiencing a period of spiritual searching during university, Brother Li discovered that lasting joy came not from worldly success but from living a life rooted in the gospel.

Following a period of discernment, he entered the Order of Friars Minor and made his first profession in 2021. He is currently pursuing theological studies at the Holy Spirit Seminary and has served in parish ministry and outreach initiatives in both Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Brother Li's solemn profession is a witness of hope and dedication, reminding the Church of the enduring call to gospel simplicity and joyful service.



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Faith and hope take centre stage at the book fair

HONG KONG (SE): Catholic communication and publishing organisations are participating in this year's Hong Kong Book Fair which runs from July 16 to 22 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, showcasing the Jubilee theme "Pilgrims of Hope."

In the opening ceremony, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chishing highlighted the fair's goal

of helping visitors deepen their understanding of God's revelation and cultivate enduring hope.

On the morning of July 16, Bishop Ha blessed the Catholic booths. He noted that the true aim of the fair's many books is to help bridge cultural and historical divides, fostering a deeper understanding of God's revelation.

He expressed hope that visi-



Booths of the Catholic diocese at the Hong Kong Book Fair.

tors would encounter God's word, nurturing lasting hope while joyfully embodying the spirit of "Pilgrims of Hope."

Encouraging volunteers and visitors, he highlighted a quote from the Letter to the Romans, featured in Pope Francis' Jubilee proclamation: "Hope does not disappoint" [Romans 5:5].

He explained that Christian hope is not a mere fantasy but a deep-rooted assurance in God's ever-fulfilled promises, emphasising the transformative journey of faith through suffering to glory.

Supported by various Catholic entities, the Catholic booths prominently features a stall for Jubilee souvenirs in front and at

...Christian hope is not a mere fantasy but a deep-rooted assurance in God's ever-fulfilled promise...

the same time presents a selection of works in theology, spirituality, family, and children's literature, written to encourage faith and facilitate spiritual growth.

Celebrating its 80th anniversary, the Catholic Centre is also exploring new avenues for evangelisation, featuring local hand-made products representing our faith.

Claretian Publications is engaging youth and non-believers with Bible-centred resources, such as the *Manga Messiah*, a cartoon-animation adaptation of the life of Jesus.

Saint Francis University seeks to integrate Caritas Bianchi College of Careers

HONG KONG (SE): Saint Francis University [SFU] submitted an application to the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications [HKCAAVQ] to formally integrate Caritas Bianchi College of Careers [CBCC] as an academic unit of the university. This significant development aims to expand academic opportunities and offer more diverse, flexible pathways for students in Hong Kong.

The application is currently under review by the accreditation body. If approved, CBCC will maintain its existing programme offerings, with all academic qualifications and awards granted to graduates remaining fully recognised. Importantly, from the beginning of the academic year this September, students enrolling at CBCC will receive graduation certificates issued by Saint Francis University—marking a milestone in the college's academic accreditation.

Plans for the integration date back to 2012, when the then Caritas Institute of Higher Education received approval for its Tseung Kwan O campus. The institution has since undergone steady transformation, culminating in its official renaming as Saint Francis University in January 2024 and its recognition as a university of Applied Sciences in November 2024.

Under the proposed integration, CBCC will retain its Department of Design and Department of General Education. Meanwhile, SFU will absorb CBCC's current Department of Business and Department of Hospitality Management, Department of Health Sciences, and Department of Social Sciences into its own academic structure. These will form part of SFU's newly established schools: the Rita Tong Liu School of Business and Hospi-

tal Management, the S.K. Yee School of Health Sciences, and the Felizberta Lo Padilla Tong School of Social Sciences.

CBCC's 12 academic programmes—including associate degrees, higher diplomas, diplomas, and professional diplomas—will continue to be offered without interruption, ensuring continuity for current and prospective students.

Saint Francis University has steadily expanded its portfolio of applied degree programmes. Notably, its Bachelor of Nursing [Honours] [Applied Degree Places] programme, launched in 2022/23, includes the use of virtual reality and mobile games to enhance nursing education. In the 2024/25 academic year, SFU will also offer a Bachelor of Business Administration [Honours] in Applied Hotel and Tourism Management.

Looking ahead to the forthcoming academic year, SFU plans to introduce a Bachelor of Crime and Security Science [Honours] and a Higher Diploma in Crime and Security Science, with a strong focus on the integration of information and communication technology in fields such as criminology, criminal justice, and financial crime.

The integration of CBCC into SFU represents a key step in strengthening the Catholic Church's mission in higher education in Hong Kong, while offering students greater access to quality, future-oriented academic programmes.

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Reflections from the vicar general

By Father Peter Choy Wai-man

Reflections on the performance of 'Benedict's Hymn'



Last week, I participated in the evangelistic drama, "Benedict's Hymn," created by the talent show planning committee of St. Benedict's Church. Many people are curious as to why I participated in this production. Those who know me a little tend to think I am not suited for theater acting. They perceive me as a somewhat awkward person whose lectures or explanations are always monotonous, lacking the lively passion of inflection and expression, with a limited range of facial expressions.

In fact, when the planning committee invited me to portray St. Benedict in the play, I declined immediately. The reason was simple: I knew that acting was not my strong suit. Even if I was willing to give it a try, there was doubt about my ability to participate in all the rehearsals. However, I eventually agreed due to their reassuring words: "Father, don't worry! You won't need to spend too much time rehearsing; just be yourself!"

"Be myself!" Initially, I thought of St. Benedict as a serious, quiet character, so I believed I wouldn't need to deliberately act or rehearse; I could simply portray the role naturally. However, after this experience, it feels less like I brought St. Benedict to life but more like he brought me to life.

The essence of "Benedict's Hymn" was not to depict St. Benedict's life but to explore how modern people can practically embody his spirit through several true stories, transforming the "Rule" he left for members of his order into daily guidance for a closer relationship with God.

The first real-life story recounted how a baby named Heidi, who suffers from congenital heart disease, along with her mother and brother, learned to look at God's arrangements with an open heart. With a sense of reverence towards the Lord, they faced pain courageously, never shying away from his plans. They embodied the first level of St. Benedict's 12 degrees of humility, which calls us to approach God with reverence and to follow his plans with a sincere heart.

Through the dialogue between a blind elderly woman and her nurse, the second vignette allowed the audience to experience the power of "calm listening," reminding us that the ninth degree of St. Benedict's 12 degrees of humility is about maintaining silence, choosing words carefully, and listening to others.

The third act depicted two common issues faced by families in Hong Kong today: the differing choices of a mother and daughter regarding immigration, and the disputes between parents and children over studies and career. It illustrated how, with the spirit of St. Benedict's humble surrender, they could embrace mutual understanding and enjoy familial love in the Lord.

Confronting life and death is undoubtedly one of life's greatest challenges. The final scene showcased how two innocent children, Heidi and Lucy, relied on the Lord in the face of death, demonstrating the essence of St. Benedict's teachings about acceptance and uniting with God.

I am incredibly grateful to all people involved, both actors and those behind the scenes in this performance. Through these four distinct real-life stories, you have brought St. Benedict's spirit to life for the audience. It is not that we have embodied St. Benedict, rather it is his principles of respecting God, listening, humble surrender and acceptance that have enlivened us.

Patriarchs show solidarity with Christian communities attacked in the West Bank

TAYBEH (OSV NEWS): The Council of Patriarchs and Heads of Churches of the Holy Land visited the West Bank village of Taybeh on July 14, following increasing attacks on the community by extremist settlers.

The Council called on Israeli authorities to hold them accountable for assaults on agricultural lands and holy sites they said in a joint statement read by Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III at the beginning of their visit.

They said Israeli authorities "facilitate and enable" the settler presence around Taybeh and demanded an "immediate and transparent investigation" into why the Israeli police did not respond to emergency calls from the local communities during recent attacks and why the "abhorrent actions" continue to go unpunished.

"The attacks by the hands of settlers against our community, which is living in peace, must stop, both here in Taybeh and elsewhere throughout the West Bank. This is clearly part of the systematic attacks against Christians that we see unfolding throughout the region," they said in the statement.

They also called for "prayers, attention, and action" from diplomats, politicians and journalists -- especially from world Christians.

They said in a statement that "repeated, systematic attacks from these radicals" are "only growing more frequent."

The Church leaders noted that over the past month the extremist settlers have led cattle to graze on the agricultural land on the east side of Taybeh, making them inaccessible to their owners and damaging the olive groves which the farmers depend on. They also noted that several homes were attacked by the settlers who lit fires and erected a billboard which, translated into English, read: "There is no future for you here."

"The Church has had a faithful presence in this region for nearly 2,000 years. We firmly reject this message of exclusion and reaffirm our commitment to a Holy Land that is a mosaic of different faiths, living peacefully together in dignity and safety," they said.

Taybeh has been targeted by settlers from the nearby Rimoni settlement who set up tents on Taybeh land, with attacks including the burning of homes, olive groves, and signifi-



Cardinal Pizzaballa, centre left, and Patriarch Theophilos III, second from right, pray in St. George Church in Taybeh, the West Bank, on July 14. Photo: OSV News/Debbie Hill

cant religious and cultural landmarks such as setting land next to the Byzantine cemetery and the 5th century Al-Khader [St. George] Church on fire on July 7. Residents reported that nearby Israeli soldiers not only failed to intervene but actively shielded the settlers as the violence unfolded.

'The Church has had a faithful presence in this region for nearly 2,000 years. We firmly reject this message of exclusion...'

Rami Khourh, recounted how his uncle, whose land abuts the settler encampment in Taybeh, had been forced to watch from his home recently as the settlers set their cattle loose on the barley field he had planted for his sheep herd. All the crops were eaten and his uncle eventually relocated his sheep out of fear that they would be stolen. Khourh has also been unable to reach his own olive groves out of fear of being attacked by settlers.

"I am very afraid. I am afraid they will take the olives I pick and our tools. We feel like we are tied up. We can't do anything. It is ridiculous that we are scared and feel we can't go anywhere," he said.

"We denounce this attempt to take over land. We denounce this criminal intimidation and tactic by settler groups and request

an investigation and proper measures be taken to protect Taybeh and the surrounding villages," said Taybeh's Christ the Redeemer Catholic parish priest, Father Bashar Fawadleh, at the opening of the patriarchs' visit. "We are not passers-by. We are the memory of this land. We are steadfast and deeply rooted in our heritage of faith."

The Church leaders led prayers at the Al-Khader Church, with the lingering stench of the burned brush beyond the ancient stone walls still hanging in the air. Pierbattista Cardinal Pizzaballa, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, told journalists that the Christian leaders had contacted the Israeli Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories about the settler attacks and would keep insisting at "every opportunity" that Israeli authorities denounce the attacks. He said they would be "relentless" to have their voices heard to "at least get answers about the situation."

Cardinal Pizzaballa said they stood closely with the villagers and asked the media and diplomats from almost 30 countries that accompanied their delegation to help keep attention focused on the issue.

He said that while the unity shown by the presence of Christian leaders of all denominations was "very important" the situation remained "very concerning."

The recent attacks in Taybeh are part a broader pattern of settler violence and impunity unfolding across the West Bank, especially since attention has been focused on the war in the Gaza Strip.

EDITORIAL

SUNDAY EXAMINER

20 JULY 2025

Encountering the Saints

THE 13-DAY "PILGRIMS of Hope" relic pilgrimage, organised by the Catholic Education Office and the Diocesan Commission for Marriage and the Family, has successfully concluded. With 26 sessions and over 5,000 participants, it offered a profound opportunity to reflect on and emulate the exemplary lives of the saints through the veneration of relics.

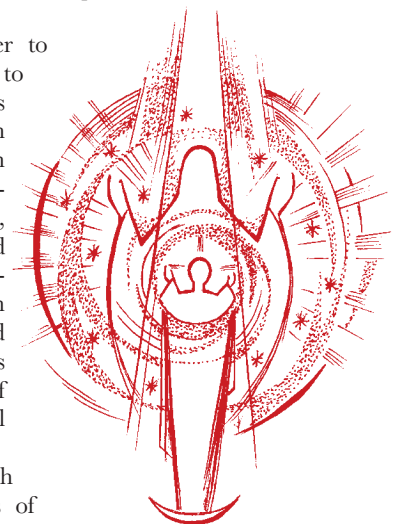
Despite torrential rain on some days, the fervent spirit of the participants remained undampened as they journeyed forth. Upon arriving at the venue, participants first watched a pre-recorded talk by Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing, followed by sessions where representatives of religious congregations shared stories of saints or their own vocational experiences, or laypeople led contemplative prayer with sacred images and music. Finally, participants entered the exhibition hall for personal veneration of the relics, in some sessions there were priests available to administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

This relic pilgrimage, now in its third year, showcased over 100 relics, with special contributions from various religious congregations and the Coptic Orthodox Church, fostering ecumenical unity among Christian denominations. Through the Catholic Education Office, teachers and students from Catholic schools were invited to participate. Schools affiliated with religious congregations also organised student visits to deepen their understanding of the founding charisms and spiritualities of their institutions, enhancing their sense of belonging to their schools and the Catholic Church while immersing them in the prayerful atmosphere.

This was an excellent evangelisation opportunity. There were relics of young saints and patrons of young people such as Blessed Carlo Acutis, who will be canonised on September 7, St. Dominic Savio, and Pope St. John Paul II. Young people encountered these holy figures and seeds of faith were planted in their hearts that will gradually sprout and grow.

Participants drew closer to God and looked upward to their heavenly home. This event was not merely an exhibition but a pilgrim journey: participants venerated the saints' relics, prayed before them, and experienced their real companionship, helping them rely on God to face and overcome daily challenges with courage, in hope of one day reuniting with all the saints.

Let us live each day with faith, becoming "Pilgrims of Hope." SE



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AI must have ethical management, protect the human person, pope says

VATICAN (CNS): Pope Leo XIV urged global leaders and experts to establish a network for the governance of AI and to seek ethical clarity regarding its implementation and use for the common good.

Artificial intelligence “requires proper ethical management and regulatory frameworks centred on the human person, and which goes beyond the mere criteria of utility or efficiency,” Pietro Cardinal Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, wrote in a message sent on the pope’s behalf and read out by Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, the Vatican representative to UN agencies in Geneva, at the AI for Good Summit 2025 held from July 8-11 in Geneva.

The summit, organised by the International Telecommunication Union in partnership with some 40 UN agencies and the Swiss government, focused on “identifying innovative AI applications, building skills and standards, and advancing partnerships to solve global challenges,” according to the event’s website.

“Humanity is at a crossroads, facing the immense potential generated by the digital revolution



Illustration: OSV News/Dado Ruvic, Reuters

driven by Artificial Intelligence,” the message said.

“Although responsibility for the ethical use of AI systems begins with those who develop, manage and oversee them, those who use them also share in this responsibility,” it said.

“On behalf of Pope Leo XIV, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to seek ethical clarity and to establish a coordinated local and global governance of AI, based on the shared recognition of the inherent dignity and fundamental freedoms

of the human person,” Cardinal Parolin wrote.

“This epochal transformation requires responsibility and discernment to ensure that AI is developed and utilised for the common good, building bridges of dialogue and fostering fraternity, and ensuring it serves the interests of humanity as a whole,” he wrote.

When it comes to AI’s increasing capacity to adapt “autono-

‘...[AI] cannot replicate moral discernment or the ability to form genuine relationships’

mously,” the message said, “it is crucial to consider the anthropological and ethical implications, the values at stake and the duties and regulatory frameworks required to uphold those values.”

The papal message said, “While AI can simulate aspects of human reasoning and perform specific tasks with incredible speed and efficiency, it cannot replicate moral discernment or the ability to form genuine relationships. Therefore, the development of such technological advancements must go hand in hand with respect for human and social values, the capacity to judge with a clear conscience and growth in

human responsibility.”

Cardinal Parolin congratulated and thanked the members and staff of the International Telecommunication Union, which was celebrating its 160th anniversary, “for their work and constant efforts to foster global cooperation in order to bring the benefits of communication technologies to the people across the globe.”

He wrote, “Connecting the human family through telegraph, radio, telephone, digital and space communications presents challenges, particularly in rural and low-income areas, where approximately 2.6 billion persons still lack access to communication technologies.”

The message said, “We must never lose sight of the common goal” of contributing to what St. Augustine called “the tranquility of order,” and fostering “a more humane order of social relations, and peaceful and just societies in the service of integral human development and the good of the human family.”

Vatican still ready to host peace talks between Russia and Ukraine

Gaza’s Christian community perseveres amid hardship and hope

GAZA (VATICAN MEDIA/OSV NEWS): Father Gabriel Romanelli, parish priest of the Holy Family Parish in Gaza, said that the area’s small Christian community is exhausted by war and a severe lack of food. He spoke to Vatican Radio after Israeli air strikes killed 13 people—six of them children—at a water collection point on July 13.

Father Romanelli noted that basic goods had reached unimaginable prices and are almost impossible to find due to blockade of humanitarian aid. He said flour reached US\$11 per half kilogramme, tomatoes are US\$13 per half kilogramme and a single onion costs between US\$14 and US\$17.

Sugar is US\$50 per half kilogramme, he said, “But coffee, bitter or not, is out of reach entirely: it goes for no less than €250 [US\$290] per kilo.”

Father Romanelli said that the aid they had stored during the truce “allowed us to sustain ourselves for the past few months, and even to help several Muslim families living in the neighbourhood of the parish. But after Israel halted humanitarian aid on March 3, nothing else has arrived. Since then, we’ve had to keep what remains for ourselves and even then, we are rationing it carefully.”

“All around us, there is only death and destruction. Day and night, we live with the sound of bombs falling, sometimes just a few hundred metres from the church. It is surreal, but after 21 months, these terrible explosions have become part of our daily routine,” he said.

Father Romanelli has fond memories of the phone calls Pope Francis gave him almost every night, when he was still in good health.

“The nightly phone calls from Pope Francis were a tremendous source of strength,” he said.

“To know that we are just a small part of something much greater—the universal Church—and to know that over a billion Christians around the world are praying for this small, suffering community, gives us extraordinary resilience. Food, medicine, and fuel are as essential to us as prayer itself. Without prayer, ours and yours, we would not have made it this far. We are counting on you,” he said.

VATICAN (CNS): Pope Leo XIV reiterated his willingness to host representatives of Russia and Ukraine at the Vatican for peace negotiations at a meeting with Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, on July 9.

“During the cordial conversation, the importance of dialogue as the preferred means of ending hostilities was reaffirmed,” the Vatican press office said in a communique released after the meeting.

The two leaders met in the early afternoon at the papal villa in Castel Gandolfo, southeast of Rome, for their 30-minute closed-door meeting.

Pope Leo spoke to Zelenskyy about “the ongoing conflict and the urgent need for a just and lasting peace,” the Vatican communique said.

“The Holy Father expressed his sorrow for the victims and renewed his prayers and closeness to the Ukrainian people, encouraging every effort aimed at the release of prisoners and the search for shared solutions,” it said.

“The Holy Father reiterated the willingness to welcome representatives of Russia and Ukraine to the Vatican for negotiations,” it added.

Outside the villa after the meeting, Zelenskyy told Vatican



Pope Leo and Volodymyr Zelenskyy wave from the papal villa in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, on July 9.

Photo: CNS / Vatican Media

Media reporters that “we really count on” the pope’s offer to host a meeting of “high-level leaders to finish this war.”

Speaking in English he said, “I am very grateful to his holiness for this meeting, for hosting us, and of course for his help,” and the Vatican’s help, not only with prayers, but also in trying “to get back our children, stolen children by Russia during this war. This is a very important question; we spoke about it.”

He stressed, “We want peace, we want this war to be finished.”

On X, formerly known as Twitter, Zelenskyy said the proposal

for high-level talks at the Vatican “remains open and entirely possible with the goal of stopping Russian aggression and achieving a stable, lasting and genuine peace. At present, only Moscow continues to reject this proposal, as it has turned down all other peace initiatives.”

He wrote in his post, “We will continue to strengthen global solidarity so that diplomacy can still succeed,” saying he also invited the pope to visit Ukraine.

Before Zelenskyy departed, Pope Leo told him it was a “pleasure to see you. You are in my prayers.”

Gaza: 'I raise my voice hoping that someone in the world will hear it'



A woman and child walk through debris in the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip in June 2024.

Photo: OSV News/Abed Khaled, Reuters

By Helda Ayyad, Gaza, via Vatican News

I write these words from the heart of pain: the parish of Gaza, where I have been living as a displaced person during nearly two years of war. And I write them as a student who wants to speak to the world.

Before I completed my high school exams, my days were full of anticipation and hope. When I read the results—an excellent 94.7—I thought the doors to a bright future had opened before me. I already imagined myself walking through the corridors and classrooms of a university, attending lessons, conferences, and debates, building the future with my own hands. My dream of entering university was not just a desire, but the result of years of hard work, perseverance, and a deep thirst for knowledge and teaching.

But the war changed everything. Instead of attending my third year of university, I now find myself far from any classroom and trapped in a sad, unimaginable reality. I still try to learn something through a screen, searching for scraps of hope in circumstances that crush every possible dream and ambition. Every day, I am robbed of a true university experience—and with it, my time, my aspirations, and, in a sense, myself.

My pain is not only about being deprived of higher education. It is the deeper sorrow of losing the life I should be living. How can a soul thirsty for knowledge grow in an environment lacking even the most basic elements of life? I miss the classrooms, the discussions among students, the challenges that shape character, refresh the soul, and structure the mind.

I am not seeking a degree. I am seeking a space in which to live, to experience life, to grow as a person. I dream of an environment where I can find myself, learn, flourish, and help build a better future for myself and those around me.

In this darkness, my Christian faith remains the light that guides me, gives me strength, and awakens a hope that does not disappoint. In my prayers, I carry this hope and my dreams, along with my pain, convinced that God hears me and is preparing a new path for my life.

I hold close the words of Jeremiah: “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for peace and not disaster, to give you a future full of hope” [Jeremiah 29:11]. I am not asking for the impossible, but for the most basic of rights: to live, to learn, to be able to pursue my life goals. And I continue to believe with faith that today’s suffering will turn into something great: the beginning of a new life and the emergence of new educational opportunities.

From within this church, which for us is also a shelter from the bombs, I raise my voice, hoping that someone in the world will hear it.

Helda Ayyad, a young woman displaced by nearly two years of war in Gaza, writes from within a parish-turned-shelter to share her story via Vatican News. Once a top-performing student with dreams of university and a future built through learning, she now finds herself cut off from the classrooms and community that once gave her purpose.



The facility run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd is a haven where, with work and education, girls can overcome neglect and trauma. Photo: AsiaNews

Centre for young abuse victims in Cavite celebrates 25 years

MANILA (ASIANEWS): The Bukid Kabataan Centre [BKC] in Cavite celebrated 25 years under the aegis of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd [RGS] on June 7. The centre serves girls who have survived gender-based violence and street life in the Philippines.

The anniversary was an opportunity to remember the centre’s origins and its commitment to empowerment and the rediscovery of self-esteem, through the sharing of life-changing experiences.

Dozens of girls who have been exploited, abused and neglected have found a safe place at the centre, a refuge where they can heal from the trauma they endured.

The BKC is based on the principles of care, healing, and teaching, and continues to provide comprehensive interventions that restore dignity, self-esteem, and hope to every child.

During their stay at the centre, the girls are taught essential skills to help them prepare for life outside the facility.

They are offered opportunities for part-time work on weekends and in the summer. They also earn money by making rosaries and bracelets, which they sell to partner NGOs and visitors.

As they move on to the next stage of their lives, the assistance programme ensures they continue to receive care, support, and guidance.

For the event commemorating its quarter-century, the BKC invited former students to share their life experiences.

‘One of our concerned neighbours escorted my sister and me to the Bukid Kabataan Centre, where we received a warm welcome’

“I wanted to be a writer when I grew up,” said 14-year-old Joan [not her real name].

“Writing about other people’s experiences, especially those who have experienced abuse, was something I wanted to do. I wished to inspire other young people who had encountered comparable difficulties and give significance to their stories,” she explained.

“At the shelter, I discovered how to lead a contented and tranquil life. Their love taught me to cherish my life,” she added. “I have faith that no one will harm or mistreat me. I also gained self-expression and fear management skills. I have clung to God’s assurance.”

Another 15-year-old girl, Lucy [not her real name], described how her time at the centre gave her a renewed sense of security, happiness, and optimism for the

future. “One of our concerned neighbours escorted my sister and me to the Bukid Kabataan Centre, where we received a warm welcome,” she explained.

“We deeply appreciated the opportunity to be here. At the centre, we were able to experience the delight of childhood again. We felt safe and secure because the centre satisfies our basic needs and protects us from danger and worry,” she added.

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd were founded in France in 1835 by Saint Marie-Euphrasie Pelletier, with the first arriving in the Philippines in 1912.

In Cavite, the nuns began their work in 1983, initially as the Morning Glory Programme of the Archdiocese of Manila, with the collaboration of Caritas Manila. The congregation then assumed full management of the programme and BKC in 2000.

A girl can stay for up to three years, although special circumstances may allow exceptions. For those who move on, there is family counselling, educational support, and an after-school care programme.

For programme director, Sister Gemma Dinglasan RGS, the children go to the gardens that are part of the facility after school and can engage in gardening.

They love watching the seedlings grow and enthusiastically tend the plots under the close supervision of farmworkers. They enjoy harvesting. With this method of education and care, the children learn to be strong and responsible citizens.



Screenshot of a video from the Houthi rebels' Ansarullah Media Centre showing the heliborne assault and boarding of the vehicle carrier Galaxy Leader in the Red Sea off Yemen, in 2023. Photo: UCAN/bairdmaritime.com

Call for repatriation of Filipino seafarers caught in Middle East conflict

MANILA (UCAN): Stella Maris-Philippines reiterated its call for the immediate and safe repatriation of overseas Filipino workers stuck in the Israel-Palestine region after four seafarers were reportedly killed in a Houthi attack on a cargo vessel in the Red Sea.

"The welfare of our citizens abroad must always be a top priority," said Father John Mission, national director of the seafarers' ministry, addressing the government of president, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., after the it announced on July 9 that two Filipino seafarers were "most likely" killed during an attack, while five of the 21 Filipino sailors aboard the Eternity C cargo ship had been rescued.

At least four were killed and many were "kidnapped" in the second Houthi attack in a week on a Red Sea cargo ship, Reuters reported on July 10.

"Our deepest condolences go out to the families and loved ones affected by this heartbreaking event," Father Mission said on July 10. "As to the missing seafarers, we do hope and pray they will be recovered."

He said Stella Maris-Philippines stands in solidarity with the victims and their families during this difficult time.

"We ask our chaplaincies to reach out to the families in crisis and accompany them," the priest added.

He also urged the Philippine government to take "enhanced measures to ensure the safety and security of our seafarers working in high-risk areas. It is vital that

'This is merely a reiteration for our Filipino seafarers of their right to refuse sailing through high-risk zones, which is a well-entrenched maritime tradition'

we prioritise their protection and well-being."

On July 9, Department of Foreign Affairs undersecretary, Eduardo de Vega, told reporters in Manila that cargo ship Eternity C had "sunk and rescue operations are ongoing." The ship was reportedly carrying grains to Somalia for the World Food Programme when the Iran-backed militants attacked it.

Meanwhile, Migrant Workers secretary, Hans Leo Caddac, reminded Filipino seafarers that they have the right to refuse sailing through "high-risk, war-like" regions, particularly traversing the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, amid the latest attacks of Houthi rebels in the said danger zone.

"This is merely a reiteration for our Filipino seafarers of their right to refuse sailing through

high-risk zones, which is a well-entrenched maritime tradition," Caddac said at a press conference on July 8.

Houthi rebels operating in the Red Sea have already attacked two ships with Filipino seafarers onboard: MV Eternity C with 21 Filipino crew on July 8, and the MV Magic Seas with 17 Filipino crew on July 6.

The 17 Filipino seafarers onboard MV Magic Seas were safe and accounted for, and will be repatriated back home, said Filipino officials.

Amid continued threats of piracy and ransom, and ship attacks in African waters, and elsewhere, the Philippines has remained one of the biggest providers of shipping crew around the globe, numbering over 20 per cent of the world's 1.2 million shipping manpower.

The Philippine government has maintained a neutral stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict, given the tough situation facing the country's 2.1 million overseas Filipino workers in the Middle East region, including some 30,000 Filipinos living and working in Israel.

South Korean president proposes papal visit to North Korea



Cardinal You at a press conference in Daejeon in June 2021. Photo: UCAN/Catholic Times of Korea

SEOUL (UCAN): South Korea's president, Lee Jae Myung, proposed that Pope Leo XIV consider a visit to North Korea, while expressing gratitude for the Vatican's support for improving inter-Korean relations.

Lee made his remarks during a meeting with Lazarus Cardinal You Heung-sik, prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for the Clergy, at the presidential office in Seoul on July 7, the Korea JoongAng Daily reported.

"Since he cares deeply about peace on the Korean Peninsula, I wonder if he might consider stopping by North Korea on his way," Lee said, referring to the 2027 Catholic World Youth Day [WYD], which Seoul is set to host.

Cardinal You affirmed that Pope Leo will arrive in South Korea for WYD.

He recalled that Pope Leo's election had kindled in him a hope that "something major would happen for peace on the Korean Peninsula."

The cardinal said that the pope is expected to play a significant role in inter-Korean relations.

"It would be wonderful if, in 2027, we could see an image of President Lee and Kim Jong-un together in a photo with the pope," he added.

Lee expressed gratitude to the Vatican for its support for inter-Korean reconciliation.

"As the Catholic Church holds a special interest in peace

'Since he [Pope Leo] cares deeply about peace on the Korean Peninsula, I wonder if he might consider stopping by North Korea on his way'

on the peninsula and the stability of South Korea, I hope the Holy See can play a meaningful role—even before the pope's visit," Lee said. He also emphasised that his government is committed to improving inter-Korean relations and reducing ongoing tensions between South and North Korea.

"We are working to open a door to dialogue through trust-building and tension-reduction measures," Lee said while expressing hope that the Holy See will continue to support South Korea's efforts towards achieving peace.

Since taking office, Lee's administration has moved to de-escalate tensions with North Korea.

South Korea had suspended the loudspeaker broadcasts and leaflet campaigns directed at North Korea. In return, the North has responded by halting its broadcasts targeting the South.

Lee and Cardinal You also discussed a possible meeting with Pope Leo. The cardinal said that the pope has expressed interest in meeting Lee at the Vatican ahead of the upcoming WYD, while Lee expressed hope of meeting with Pope Leo "before 2027, if possible."

Former president, Moon Jae-in had visited the Vatican in 2018 and 2021 to extend an invitation to then-Pope Francis to visit North Korea.

At the time, Pope Francis had responded that he would go "if an official invitation came from the North."

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The young heroes who help save the Philippines

By Father Shay Cullen

The greatest force in the world is one that attracts and brings people and things together, one that created the Earth and affects everyone, for good or bad. This force can unite and strengthen bonds. The closer they are, the stronger and greater is the force.

Commitment, dedication, and love of neighbour and creation are spiritual forces we see today in our young people who are fighting for climate justice and protecting the environment.

In calling for climate justice, these young heroes are actively protecting the environment and advocating for the Philippines to take more action and put the welfare of people ahead of profit.

Greenpeace Philippines recognised some of these heroes, including Jefferson Estela of Youth Strike for Climate. He called for greater participation of the youth in national decision-making and led his organisation to advance its goal of combating climate change.

The danger is growing and the climate crisis will soon reach a point of no return

Also recognised is Sophia Caralde, Youth Strike 4 Climate Philippines' education and research committee head. She works to raise awareness among the youth to solve the climate crisis and challenges Philippine government officials to respond to the call for lower carbon dioxide [CO₂] emissions.

Also working for climate justice is Bill Bontigao, president of the Bicol University Science Alliance Club, who called on government officials to take action and have the political will to declare a national climate emergency.

It is through knowledge and science that we and the youth can understand the forces at work in the universe and that affect our world and our lives. It is not just



a matter of bad weather. There are two massive forces driving climate change: nature and people.

The most powerful physical force in nature is, of course, gravity. This is the force responsible for our continued existence because it affects the global climate and holds the atmosphere together. That is the basis of all life — your life, your child's, of the community, of the planet.

Perhaps, of equal importance is that gravity exerts force on atmospheric density and ocean

currents, on the distribution of water on the planet that affects global cooling or warming. Since 71 per cent of the planet's surface is covered with water and about 96.5 per cent of all this water is in the oceans, that has a powerful effect on the world's climate.

No longer stable

When we gaze at the night sky and see the moon, we know that gravity is attracting the moon to the Earth. That has a powerful effect on our climate, too, because that causes the tides, the rise and fall of the oceans. More than that, the force of gravity on the moon helps stabilise the Earth's axial tilt. This is what creates the seasons and makes for a stable climate and enables us to grow food to survive.

Nowadays, the planet's climate is no longer stable. After a billion years, we humans, the rational and intelligent species, have done something to change that once-stable, ordered and disciplined relationship with nature that affects the entire planet and the lives of all living creatures.

About 265 years ago in England, a few people—out of a world population of 1 billion then—began the Industrial Revolution that was driven by fossil fuels. That has not stopped since.

This has ultimately resulted in global warming, which is having a catastrophic impact on all living things. This is a most terrible, unforeseen consequence because hundreds of millions of people are suffering and dying from droughts, floods, typhoons, storms, crop failures, heat waves and pollution. Many animals and plants are facing extinction.

These are the concerns of young climate-justice activists today. They have alerted world leaders to this grave danger, and international agreements have been reached among nations to phase out fossil fuels and expand renewable-energy alternatives, like wind and solar power. But this is not enough. The danger is growing and the climate crisis will soon reach a point of no return. The biggest producers of

greenhouse gas emissions, including CO₂ and methane, are China, the United States and some European nations. Other significant contributors include India, Russia and Japan.

In the Philippines, there were 64 existing coal-fired power plants connected to the main grid as of December 2024. San Miguel Global Power, AboitizPower, Manila Electric Co., Therma Luzon Inc., Therma South Inc. and Therma Marine Inc. all use coal and oil for electricity generation. Renewable energy generators such as solar plants and some wind turbines are far from replacing coal and oil.

Surveys conducted worldwide show that, out of 10,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 25, a shocking 60 per cent said they were very worried about the effects of climate on their future. The United Nations has warned that more dangers lie ahead as higher temperatures are recorded.

The latest forecast from the World Meteorological Organisation indicates that there is an 80 per cent likelihood that the world will see its annual average global temperature exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels for at least one of the next five years. People are taking their stand to push and advocate for more serious action to limit CO₂ and methane emissions that cause global warming.

In the Philippines, there is Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines [Yacap], a coalition of environmental youth organisations where young people are taking a stand. Yacap is organising young people to lead the global action against the climate crisis.

They said: "With the Philippines ranking as one of the most vulnerable places on Earth impacted by climate change, it is imperative for us to declare a climate emergency as defined by the people and have concrete plans on addressing the current and the possible future effects of this climate crisis."

These are just a few of the young heroes we can be proud of and there are many thousands more doing their share in making the Philippines a safer and environmentally healthy place to live.

Joyful open day concludes St. Paul's Convent School 170th anniversary celebrations

HONG KONG (SE): St. Paul's Convent School joyfully wrapped up its 170th Anniversary celebrations with an Open Day held from July 4 to 6. The event attracted over 17,000 visitors and served as the grand conclusion of a year-long series of commemorative activities, strengthening unity within the Paulinian community and reaffirming their commitment to sharing the love, passion, and enthusiasm of Paulinians with future generations.

Over the course of the anniversary year, a number of milestones were celebrated, such as the launch of the iconic tram in August, an uplifting opening Mass, a notably successful Gala Dinner, and an unforgettable Family Fun Day.

The three-day Open Day turned the campus into a lively centre of learning, creativity, and connection. Each floor was themed differently, offering interactive games, stunning displays, and engaging learning hubs. The excitement was further elevated by cultural performances, Cantonese opera presentations, friendly volleyball games, university information booths, and admission talks—all reflecting the school's unwavering commitment to holistic education as well as its dedication to fostering talents and values.



Sister Margaret Wong, Sister Angelina Fong, Ms. Michelle Li and Professor Paul Lam with student leaders in the Awards Room. Photo supplied

During the closing ceremony, Sister Margaret Wong, the principal and supervisor of the school, encouraged attendees to reflect on the many blessings they have received from our heavenly Father throughout the celebration. She expressed deep gratitude to everyone involved, including teaching staff, parents, alumni, students, and the 170th Anniversary Organising Committee, for making the celebrations unforgettable, rewarding, and a tremendous success.

Reflecting on the anniversary theme, "Innovating Today, Transforming Tomorrow," Sister Wong said, "Tomorrow is in our

hands, and we share the mission of God to create a transformative world that speaks of hope, love, and peace." With the core values nurtured in all Paulinians—including integrity and the 7Cs [charity, conscience, confidence, courage, creativity, competence, and commitment]—students are equipped to "navigate the complexities of modern life while staying grounded in their faith."

As the festivities came to a close, the Paulinian community departed with a renewed inspiration to carry forward the spirit of unity and excellence that has defined their 170-year journey, laying a strong foundation for the future.



Communities honour 150 years of mission of Society of Divine Word

Notice Board

The Society of the Divine Word (SVD) celebrated its 150th anniversary with a special Mass at the Holy Family parish, Choi Hung, on July 1, reflecting its enduring commitment to communities in Hong Kong and worldwide. The Mass was celebrated by Father Johnson Dhos, regional superior of Hong Kong and Macau, and was concelebrated by Fathers John Baptist Le Van Ba, Father Jay Flandez, Father Anthonius Baluban, and other SVD missionaries.

Father Dhos began the service by expressing gratitude to over 500 attendees, comprising diverse parish and community members, alongside SVD missionaries visiting Hong Kong.

He highlighted the Society's 150 years of global mission work and 77 years locally, tracing its roots back to its founding by Saint Arnold Janssen in 1875. With nearly 6,000 members operating in 76 countries, the SVD has also established women's congregations, and he thanked the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters present.

He reminisced that the first missionary, St. Joseph Freinademetz, embarked on his journey to China in 1879, dedi-

cating his life to the Catholic community. The congregation's official mission in Hong Kong began in 1948, focusing on education and support for migrants.

In his homily, Father Dhos reflected on the theme of the anniversary celebration, "Witnessing to the Light," stating that light in scripture symbolises God's truth, hope, and presence. He invoked the biblical phrase, "Let there be light," and Jesus' declaration, "I am the light of the world," to illustrate how followers are called to embody this light in their daily lives amidst global challenges like war and uncertainty.

He reminded those present that the mission of sharing this divine light is a universal calling for all Christians, asserting that small acts, such as listening to others for several minutes, are enough to spread hope, light, and friendship.

The Mass drew participation from Filipino, Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Chinese communities.

At the end of the Mass, the relic of Saint Arnold Jansen was blessed by Father Dhos, and participants paid their respects to the founder as well as St. Joseph Freinademetz, the model missionary.



Above: Father Dhos and Father Flandez leading prayers before the images of St. Arnold Janssen and St. Joseph Freinademetz.



Right: A cake-cutting ceremony after the Mass in Choi Hung.

Later in the afternoon, communities were invited to present aspects of the cultures from different countries where SVDs have established their missions.

Lourdes Fuentespina of the Sunday

Group of the Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Filipinos remarked that her communities were delighted to learn more about the food and costumes of Brazil while preparing for the presentation.*SE*



What makes a disciple of Christ different from others?

I am always grateful that God has given me the chance to be one of his disciples. As such, I strive to follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ to the best of my ability. I do not look down upon non-Christians; instead, I show them respect and accept them as my brothers and sisters in Christ, despite our differing beliefs and cultures. This embodies the essence of being a disciple of Christ. While I evangelize my Catholic faith, I do so without stepping on the religious beliefs of others.

—Lilia Garcia



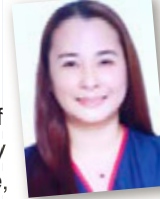
Being a disciple of Christ goes beyond simply believing in him; it requires a deeper level of commitment. The essence lies in actively engaging in a transformative journey, following him closely, learning from his teachings, and imitating his character. While many Christians may merely acknowledge Christ as their Savior, I know I believe in him deeply. Throughout the trials and ups and downs of my life, Christ has been my armor. He is the one I call upon daily, guiding me through hardships and reminding me that I am never alone. Although my faith in Christ is strong, I hesitate to label myself a disciple of Christ due to my commitment level. I aspire to embody the distinct attitudes and characteristics of a true follower. —Jam Melendez General

One key difference between being a disciple of Christ and being a casual believer is the level of commitment involved. A true disciple is dedicated to following Christ's mission, willing to learn God's Word and spread the Good News to others. Most importantly, a disciple deeply commits to obeying, learning, following, loving, and serving the Lord. In contrast, casual believers may attend Mass but quickly return to their routines without taking on any responsibilities for serving God or sharing his teachings with others. —Rosario Gonzalez



The disciples of Christ share core commitments in following Jesus, undergoing transformation by him, and participating in his mission. As I grew older, I faced numerous trials and difficulties that led me to question everything. In those moments of confusion, I fervently prayed to God for guidance and help, fully entrusting myself to him. Today, I follow Jesus with confidence, being committed to his mission by reaching out to those in need, preaching his words, performing charitable works, and engaging in various acts of service.

—Edlynne Rose R. Magalong



Shallow commitment often leads to a loss of interest. As a server of the Lord, I recognise a significant difference between merely believing and being fully committed. I have encountered individuals whom I admire deeply for their dedication to serving the Lord, even amid hardships. I will be honest—I am not a perfect disciple of Christ. However, I am fully committed to my service through loving others, practicing his teachings, and spreading the Word of the Lord.

—Ruby Magtoto

To me, what truly sets Christians, or disciples of Christ, apart is love. Even when Christians are mistreated, they do not harbor hatred; instead, they pray for those who wrong them. Love serves as the defining characteristic of Christians, aligning perfectly with God they follow. Their love is not half-hearted but wholly dedicated. Even in the face of mistreatment, insults, or ostracism, they continue to love their neighbors, as taught in Mark 12:30-31. Christian love knows no boundaries and stems from the profound love that God showed by dying on the Cross. This unconditional love is what distinguishes Christians from others.

—Bro. Leo Sugianto Lingga, Order of Carmelites, Seminarian





YOUR DAILY MASS GUIDE

JULY 20 – SIXTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the Sunday, *Gloria*, *Creed*, preface of the Sunday (green).

Readings: Genesis 18:1-10a; Colossians 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42.

JULY 21 – MONDAY: SIXTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: Exodus 14:5-18; Matthew 12:38-42.

JULY 22 – ST. MARY

MAGDALENE. Mass of the feast, *Gloria*, Eucharistic Prayer with preface proper to the feast (white). Readings: Song of Songs 3:1-4a; John 20:1-2, 11-18.

JULY 23 – WEDNESDAY: SIXTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: Exodus 16:1-5, 9-15; Matthew 13:1-9.

JULY 24 – THURSDAY: SIXTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: Exodus 19:1-2, 9-11, 16-20b; Matthew 13:10-17.

JULY 25 – ST. JAMES. Mass of the feast (red), *Gloria*, preface of the Apostles. Readings: 2 Corinthians 4:7-15; Matthew 20:20-28.

JULY 26 – SS. JOACHIM

AND ANNE. Mass of the memorial (white). Readings: Exodus 24:3-8; Matthew 13:24-30.



Apostleship of Prayer

Themes for July 2025

FORMATION IN DISCERNMENT

Let us pray that we might again learn how to discern, to know how to choose paths of life and reject everything that leads us away from Christ and the Gospel.

Sixteenth Sunday of the Year

In today's Gospel, Jesus enters the home of two sisters: Martha and Mary. It is a small, quiet moment in the Gospel of Luke, but one filled with deep meaning for our lives. This house in Bethany becomes a sacred space—a place where God himself comes not to rule, but to be welcomed, to be received with love.

We often imagine God as distant, as majestic and untouchable. But Jesus, God-with-us, knocks at the door of ordinary lives and longs to be received—not with pomp, but with love. As the Book of Revelation says: "I stand at the door and knock" (Rev 3:20). Our God is humble. He wants to enter our hearts, to be with us, to speak with us. He comes to be our friend.

Martha welcomes Jesus with generosity. She works hard, serves, prepares—she does everything out of love. But she is distracted. She becomes anxious, frustrated, even

The better part: listening to the Lord with an open heart

resentful. "Lord, do you not care?" she says. And in those words, we hear ourselves. So often, in our busy service, even in our work for the Church, we forget the One for whom we are working.

"Martha, Martha." Why is the name repeated? It is a common biblical way to highlight a person's vocation: 'Samuel, Samuel,' 'Moses, Moses,' 'Saul, Saul.' Martha is called to become a disciple. She is a good person; she gives herself, but she is not yet a disciple. To become a disciple, she must understand that she needs to prioritise her work by listening to the Word of the Master, which should guide all her activities. The consequence of neglecting this: "Martha, you are anxious and

worried."

Mary, meanwhile, sits at the feet of Jesus and listens. She chooses "the better part." Not because serving is bad—no! But because listening must come first. Before action, before words, there must be silence. There must be space to hear the voice of the Lord.

Today, Jesus invites us to slow down. He invites us to sit with him, to listen. Not with our ears only, but with our hearts. The world moves fast. We are tempted to do more, to fill our days with tasks, even good tasks. But without listening to the Word, we risk becoming like Martha—*anxious, restless, scattered.*

Let us not forget: the Gospel is not only to be preached; it must

Genesis 18:1-10a;
Readings: Colossians 1:24-28;
Luke 10:38-42

be heard. It must be received in the silence of our hearts. Let us choose the better part. Let us be disciples who first sit at the Master's feet. May our homes, our parishes, our lives be places where Jesus is not only served but loved, heard, and welcomed. And may his Word be the light that guides all we do.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, who pondered all things in her heart, teach us the beauty of listening in silence. And may the Lord give us peace—the peace that flows from time spent in his presence.



● Father Josekutty Mathew CMF



Tayong mga Pilipino ay kilala sa mundo sa pagiging hospitable o mapagtanggap at maasikaso. Basta may bisita tayo eh todo handa at istima sa mga tao. Sa mga Fiesta, kasal o binyag eh super ang ating mga handang pagkain. Gusto kasi nating mabusog at masaya ang ating mga bisita. Madalas nga me pa sharon o pabalot pa ng pagkain paguwi ng bisita.

Sa Ebanghelyo ni Lukas, ipinakita nila Marta at Maria ang pag istima at asikaso nila sa kanilang bisita, si Hesus. Para kila Marta at Maria ang pagtanggap nila kay Hesus ay pag alay ng hospitality, pag asikaso, pag

Pagtanggap at asikaso

alaga at pakikinig. Buhos talaga ang atensyon nila kay Hesus. Mag alay ng tubig, paboritong pagkain at merienda ni Hesus. Maka alis uhaw, gutom at pagod ng Panginoon sa mga pag-iikot nya at pag misyon. Yan ang pagmamahal nila sa Panginoon.

Sa ating panahon tinatawag tayong maging hospitable, mapagtanggap at mapakinig. Ang mayakap natin at matanggap ang ating kapwa ay pagyakap at pagtanggap Kay Hesus. Di ba nga sabi nya "anumang ginawa mo sa iyong

kapwa ay ginawa mo kay Hesus. Sa bawat kumakatok sa ating pintuan, si Hesus ang bisita natin sa katauhan ng ating pamilya, kaibigan, kapitbahay, dayuhan, imigrante, at mga nangangailangan.

Maging mapagtanggap nawa tayo kay Hesus sa Misa, sa Biblia at sa ating kapwa, lalo na sa mga dukha at walang walang inaasahan kundi ang Diyos mismo. Pagpalain nawa tayo ng Diyos at maging bukas ang ating puso at tahanan sa mga nangangailangan.



● Father Arnold Abelardo CMF

In the early 13th century, a notable shift in the Catholic Church saw many faithful abstaining from receiving Holy Communion, believing themselves unworthy of consuming the Body of Christ—a view that was often reinforced by clergy.

This ideological distancing between clergy and laity led to physical barriers in churches, such as rails and screens separating the congregation from the altar. While many parishioners refrained from Communion, they still sought to worship the Eucharist, often traveling from church to church to witness the consecrated host being elevated, sometimes even offering money to priests for prolonged displays of the host. This phenomenon of "gazing adoration" became a substitute for actually consuming Communion.

In response to this trend, the Church mandated that Catholics must receive Holy Communion at least once during the Easter season as per the Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council. It was during this backdrop that St. Juliana of Cornillon emerged as a key figure in rekindling respect for and the practice of receiving Communion more regularly. Beginning in 1208, she received visions from Christ aimed at establishing a special feast dedicated to the Eucharist.

Born in 1192 in what is now Belgium, Juliana became a nun after being orphaned at age five. Throughout her life, she experienced visions that included a bright moon with a dark line, symbolising the Church calendar and highlighting a lack of a specific observance for the Eucharist.

Eventually she had a dream where the Lord explained to her that the moon represented the Church year with all its feasts, and the line depicted the lack of such a special day that honored the Eucharist. Jesus asked Juliana to establish a feast day during which the faithful would adore the Blessed Sacrament, when they would seek pardon for the

A nun's visions and the feast of Corpus Christi



ultimately felt compelled to relay her visions after becoming the superior of her convent. Sharing her revelations with Canon John of Lausanne, they garnered some attention, notably from Robert de Thorete, the Bishop of Liege. In around 1246, Bishop Thorete authorised the institution of this feast within his diocese, although he passed away before its implementation.

Despite some objections indicating that Holy Thursday already represented a celebration of the Eucharist, Juliana's vision of a distinct feast persisted.

A critical turning point arrived with Jacques Pantaleon, the archdeacon of Liege, who was supportive of the feast and later became Pope Urban IV (1261-1264). Urban issued a decree in 1264 that officially introduced the feast of Corpus Christi into the universal Church calendar, countering the arguments presented against it. However, like his predecessor, Urban died before the feast could be fully realised.

Subsequently, Popes Clement V and John XXII played essential roles in actualising the feast of Corpus Christi on a universal level. Today, it is observed on the Thursday following Trinity Sunday in most parts of the world, while in many places, it is celebrated on Sunday. The initiatives stemming from St. Juliana's visions have thus led to rich rituals and devotions that publicly honour the Eucharist. Such traditions, including processions and forty-hour adoration, continue to enrich the faith, culminating in the ultimate act of receiving Jesus in Holy Communion, fostering a closer connection to the divine.

● D.D. Emmons
OSV New (Abridged by SE)

Graduating class celebrates a journey of resilience

HONG KONG (SE): The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians Siu Ming Catholic Secondary School hosted its 2025 graduation ceremony on July 4, marking the culmination of years of dedication, perseverance, and academic excellence. The event brought together proud families, devoted educators, and distinguished guests to recognise the remarkable accomplishments of this year's 98 graduates.

The Class of 2025 faced unique challenges and came out stronger and more prepared for the future. This ceremony celebrated both academic success and the resilience and unity of the graduating class. Highlights included inspiring speeches, diploma presentations, and special recognition for outstanding contributions in various fields.

Sister Kenny Luk Kum-lee, provincial of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, kicked off the ceremony with a hymn and prayer. She prayed that the graduates spread joy, inspire life and to help to build a world of justice and peace.

Leung Pui-shan, the principal, told the graduates, "Celebrate your resilience and spirit. Embrace every new challenge as the opportunity for growth. Life is not about never failing but never giving up in a never-changing world," adding, "Our school motto, Purity and Charity, will continue to help guide future choices."

She highlighted themes of resilience, character, and potential, noting the challenges the Class of 2025 had faced over the years, including online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and the transition back to in-person classes. She described them as an extraordinary group of individuals prepared to make a significant



Jasmine Ng gives the valedictory speech.

Photo supplied

Ng Wai-lam [6C], reminisced about the transformations that she and her fellow graduates experienced. She was thankful for the continuous and unwavering love, support and guidance of Sister Anita Kwok Ming-ying, the school supervisor, Principal Leung, teachers and the parents.

Among the numerous external awards, internal awards and scholarships awarded were the Sir Edward Youde Memorial Prizes for Senior Secondary School Students – to Janice Fung Wing-man [6D] and Serena Kwong Cho-ying; HK Finals Champion and Greater Bay Area Invitational Champion of Hong Kong Financial Literacy Championship to Agnes Cheng Ka-yi [6C], Vincici Koo Wing-ching [6C], Vivian Cai Kai-man [6D], Katrina Chan Hau-ye [6D]; The 5th

Biomedical Engineering Creative Competition Inter-generational Robotic Car Champion [LEGO Category] to Carri Chim Lok-lam [3C], Sophie Ho Hin Fei [3C], Miley Ma Wing-yan [3C]; Kwai Tsing District Inter-School Athletics Competition Girls' B Grade 100m and 200m Champion to Eden Pang Yee-ting [3A].

Among the other honourable guests were Dr. Gerald Siu Ching-shing, benefactor of the school; Mr. Chan Wing-king, independent manager; Dr. Chan Yee, parent manager and chairperson for the Parent-Teacher Association, Ms. Chau Po Shan, the alternate parent manager and vice-chairperson of the Parent-Teacher Association; and Mr. Michelle Tan Wing-yan, chairperson of the Past-pupils Association of Mary Help of Christians.

The graduation ceremony ended with an elegant modern Chinese dance and a moving choral singing performance.

'Celebrate your resilience and spirit. Embrace every new challenge as the opportunity for growth. Life is not about never failing but never giving up in a never-changing world'

icant impact on the world.

Benjamin Li Xiaoyi, the founder and director of Lee's Pharmaceutical Holdings Ltd, congratulated the graduates on their incredible journey in his keynote address. He remarked that the graduation ceremony was not just the end of one journey but also the start of another.

Noting that they would have numerous choices in the future, and have failures and successes. However, he stressed that failures should not define their achievements and focus on perseverance, because we must learn to fail before one can succeed. He reminded them that many suc-

cesses can only be achieved through collaboration.

Class valedictorian, Jasmine

In remembrance of my first mentor — Father George Zee, SJ

"When we are young and searching for identity and meaning, we look outward to others... These people bring out the ideals and convictions stirring within us, and as mentors, teachers, and guides, they introduce us to aspects of ourselves of which we were unaware."

— Edward Sellner

These words by Edward Sellner beautifully reflect my own experience in my growth journey—a time when I was earnestly searching for identity and a life of purpose. By the grace of God, I met Father George Zee.

I first encountered Father Zee in 1980, when a friend invited me to attend a personal growth workshop he was leading. At the time, I was a timid and shy young adult who lacked confidence. Yet deep inside, there was a yearning for change and inner growth. That yearning led me to say yes.

Father Zee was nothing like the priests I had encountered before—stern, distant, and fond of giving instructions. He was the opposite: creative, dynamic, and refreshingly liberal. He favoured stories, images, and interactive activities over lengthy lectures. He led us through awareness exercises that opened my senses in unexpected ways. I vividly



remember one exercise focused on bodily sensations. For the first time, I felt a profound intimacy with my own body. The quiet emergence of "my being" brought a peace I had never known before.

More than just a guide, Father Zee was a gentle disruptor. He invited us to question old ways of thinking. "I am angry because so-and-so did such a thing to me," we would say. But Father Zee would challenge us: "Nobody can make you angry. It is your own perception that matters." At first, this idea felt alien—even unsettling. But the moment I accepted that my inner world determined my response to life, I opened myself to a new journey of self-discovery. I came to see how much of my thought, perception, and behaviour had been shaped—programmed, even—

by early experiences. Awareness of this brought liberation through greater self-acceptance.

Another powerful truth he imparted was this: although my family greatly influenced my personality, they did not define my destiny. I alone held the responsibility to decide who I would become. "Each of us," he would remind us, "is responsible for our life—whether it turns out good or bad." Those words lit a fire within me. They gave me courage to stand up and take a bold turn in my life's direction.

Looking back, I consider Father Zee my first mentor in life. He challenged me to question, to explore, to break free from prefabricated moulds, to move beyond stereotypes, and above all, to dare to live as my authentic self. He set me on a journey of self-discovery and inner freedom. I haven't reached the destination, but along the way, I've encountered the God who dwells at the heart of my being.

News of Father Zee's passing brought forth both sadness and deep gratitude. At the vigil Mass, I gazed at the photo of him with his familiar gentle smile. And I knew—he had reached the infinite horizon.

Sister Rita Chung

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To DSE students: faith and hope

My dearest students,

“Patience walks hand-in-hand with hope, providing a steady path forward — Pope Francis

As you await the results of your Diploma of Secondary Education [DSE], I want to offer you words of encouragement and remind you of the profound hope that is available to us through our faith in Jesus Christ. This period of waiting can be filled with anticipation, and perhaps a little anxiety, but it is also an opportunity to deepen your trust in God’s loving plan for each of you.

Our Catholic Church teaches that hope is “a gift from God by which we desire the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life as our ultimate happiness” [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1817]. It is not wishful thinking, but trust in Christ’s promises and hope in the grace of the Holy Spirit to carry us through. This hope is an anchor for the soul, especially when we doubt.

Remember the words of St.



Photo by 佳叶范 on Unsplash

Paul in his letter to the Romans: “we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” [Romans 5:3-5]. While waiting for results may not be “suffering” in the most severe meaning of the world, it is a period of trial that can build endurance and char-

acter within you. This process in turn, strengthens your hope, understanding that God’s love is eternal and unchanging.

Pope Francis reminds us that “patience walks hand-in-hand with hope, providing a steady path forward” [Cycle of Catechesis. Vices and Virtues. 18. Hope, 8 May 2024]. Nowadays, in a time of instant solutions, we typically want immediate results, but this time of waiting can plant in us the virtue of patience, which is one of the fruits of the Holy

Spirit. It keeps our hope alive and makes it strong as a lifestyle.

Your worth and your future are not solely determined by the outcomes of these tests. God’s divine power has already given us everything needed for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness [2 Peter 1:3]. He has given us precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become participants of the divine nature [2 Peter 1:4]. *This means that your true self and ultimate destiny are found in your relationship with God, rather than simply success in academia.*

St. Peter encourages us to “make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with devotion, devotion with mutual affection, mutual affection with love” [2 Peter 1:5-7]. Continue cultivating these virtues in your lives, regardless of the results you receive. These are the virtues

that bring about an abundant and successful life in Christ.

Christ Jesus came into the world as a Master and a Companion, and his grace was poured out for us with the faith and love that are in him [1 Timothy 1:14-15]. He is faithful, and he will do what he promised [1 Thessalonians 5:24]. Therefore, “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” [1 Thessalonians 5:16-18].

As you wait, continue to pray, trust in God’s providence, and **remember that His plan for you is always one of hope and a future.** May He the God of peace Himself make you complete and may you be kept in full, spirit, soul, and body, blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

With prayers and blessings,

Sincerely,
Dominique Mukonda, CICM

Carlo Acutis: a saint for the digital age, a witness of Eucharistic love

By Father Joseba Kamiruuga Mieza, CMF

The Catholic Church will canonise Blessed Carlo Acutis on September 7, Pope Leo XIV has announced. The ceremony will take place in St. Peter’s Square, and is expected to draw thousands of young people from all over the world. With this canonisation, the Church will formally recognise her first millennial saint—a teenager of the digital age whose profound love for the Eucharist continues to touch the hearts of many.

Born in 1991 and dying of leukemia at the age of 15 in 2006, Carlo lived a brief life filled with extraordinary simplicity, joy, and faith. He was known for using his computer skills to evangelise, especially by building a website that documented Eucharistic miracles from around the world. His favourite saying, “The Eucharist is my highway to Heaven,” has since inspired countless young Catholics.

Together with Carlo, Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, a young man known for his social outreach and deep spirituality, will also be canonised. These two figures—one from the early 20th

century, the other from the 21st—stand as vibrant reminders that holiness is not a matter of age or era, but of fidelity to Christ and love of neighbour.

Carlo’s story has understandably ignited renewed interest in the Eucharist, especially among the young. Yet this moment also invites us to reflect more deeply on how we speak about Eucharistic devotion, and how we educate believers in the mystery of the Real Presence of Christ.

Some voices have rightly distinguished between personal spiritual experience and doctrinal expression. A canonisation, after all, is not a declaration of theological completeness, but a recognition of a person’s heroic virtue and fidelity to the gospel.

Saints are not canonised because all their devotional practices are universal or theologically complete, but because they lived lives of exceptional holiness in communion with the Church.

It is worth recalling that even great theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas, a Doctor of the Church, did not foresee or affirm every doctrine later defined by the Magisterium, such as the Immaculate Conception, formally proclaimed in 1854. Holiness does not imply infallibility,



Carlo Acutis, who will be canonised on September 7.

File photo: CNS/courtesy Sainthood Cause of Carlo Acutis

The true miracle of the Eucharist is not found in extraordinary signs—it is in the ordinary, daily conversion of hearts...

and personal spirituality, however beautiful, is not necessarily normative.

The risk today is not Carlo’s example—it is the over-simplification of his example. To present

his deep and sincere Eucharistic devotion as a doctrinal template for all may unintentionally narrow the Church’s rich and living understanding of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is not a private relic or object of obsession; it is the living memorial of Christ’s Paschal Mystery, celebrated within the Church and inseparable from her mission of justice, mercy, and communion.

Let us not mistake emotional intensity for theological maturity. Let us not reduce the unfathomable mystery of the Eucharist to

merely a catalogue of extraordinary phenomena. To do so risks distorting both the miracle and the Mystery.

A saint, not a system

What the Church holds up in Blessed Carlo Acutis is not a model of doctrinal completeness, but a young man in love with Christ, devoted to prayer, committed to helping others, and inspired by the beauty of the Eucharist. His faith, nourished as it was within a culture often indifferent or hostile to religion, is a shining light for our times.

We are called to celebrate his canonisation not by replicating his devotional preferences, but by imitating his humility, his wonder, and his willingness to let Jesus shape his life. This is the Eucharistic witness the Church needs: not one of obsessive focus on externals, but one that radiates love, reverence, and transformation.

The true miracle of the Eucharist is not found in extraordinary signs—it is in the ordinary, daily conversion of hearts made possible through communion with Christ and the Church. That is what Carlo Acutis lived, and that is what every believer is invited to rediscover.