



# Novena for St Francis of Assisi and Bl Carlo Acutis

Join us on a Eucharistic journey from the Feast of Saint Francis on 4th October to the Feast of Blessed Carlo Acutis on 12th October. Nine days of humility, Eucharistic love and companionship in Assisi.

Eight hundred years separate these two Blesseds and perhaps 800 metres separate their respective resting places in Assisi. Today, they rejoice together in Heaven, smiling upon us, promising a friendship with God and leading us into a mystery of deep Eucharistic Communion. Let us be close to them in these days as we ask for their intercession and to bring their wisdom to our world as we desire only union with God. Neither was a priest, Francis because he considered himself unworthy and Carlo for he died as a teenager. However, they both invite adoration and humility and a deep and personal love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Separate in culture, centuries of time and world events, they both point us to Assist as a contemporary and perennial cradle of Christianity. Let Francis challenge and unsettle us and Carlo hold our hands as we ever so humbly and adoringly approach the one who is all humility and love – who is the Eucharistic Lord.

## DAY ONE

The Baptism of John who was to be called Francis was celebrated in the Cathedral of San Rufino. The sacrament for all can easily be lost as a spiritual reality in its effect and power. For Francis, it was a moment of deep encounter which would leave him marked for all his earthly existence. His soul in God's divine providence was marked out for a deep personal identification and union with Christ. It started a journey which was to find its perfection in the receiving of the stigmata and the debilitating illness and blindness that were to mark the last brief chapter of his life.

As Francis was baptised in Assisi and Carlo in London let us pray for a deeper love and gratitude for the gift of Baptism and its promise of unity with Christ.

## LITANY

### Prayer to St Francis of Assisi and Blessed Carlo Acutis

Father in Heaven, you have given us in Francis and Carlo wonderful examples of a call to adore, to be full of love for God and to be humble in His presence. The celebration of Mass and that which is most holy was at the centre of their lives. We ask that through this Novena we may become ever more wedded to the Eucharist, desirous of loving Jesus and ready to spread that fragrance to all the people we meet.

I ask you to confirm my faith, nurture my hope and strengthen my charity as I seek to be like Carlo and Francis who were mirrors to the world of your truth.

Grant me the grace that I need to live out this endeavour...  
Our Father. Hail Mary. Glory Be.



The font in which Saint Francis was baptised.

## DAY TWO

### His Home and Birthplace

“Hoc oratorium fuit bovis et asini stabulum in quo natus est sanctus Franciscus mundi speculum” – this is the stable where Saint Francis the mirror of the world was born. Francis before his conversion like Carlo was much like his contemporaries – he loved to sing, dance, fight and live his “troubadour” culture. There was nothing exceptionally pious or otherworldly about these years although marked by a deep generosity of spirit which would spiral into extravagance, an openness and empathy for the poor and destitute. His parents were not over indulgent – his mother more than his father. In this normalcy, God was to work and to touch the soul which was to become a mirror for people’s actions and behaviour. As Francis was touched by grace so he showed how Christ is – as we look at him, we will see Christ in his glory manifesting himself in those forty-four years of life.

Let us pray that we will not be afraid of youth but acknowledge that in those years of our lives, God comes to us in our innocence and purity so that we may understand his purposes and mind. Let us ask that Carlo in his tender years may lead us to the beauty of the Eucharist.

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The house in which St Francis lived and was born.

### DAY THREE

#### **The failed attempt to live the life of the Knight in Apulia and the return to Assisi**

He thought he had been called to join in the worldly delights of battles won, territory conquered and glory given. Dressed as a knight for war, he had stopped at San Sabino near Spoleto because of illness. In a dream he was asked why he wanted not to have the master or the rich lord but the servant – why turn your back on the promise of life in Jesus for the glamour and appeal of the world. Why not let God shape and mould you to his unique plan which can only come when we love and are humble? Let us pray in the spirit of Carlo that we will take the “autostrada” to Heaven and that we will not remain photocopies. It is only God who can fashion us.

### LITANY

#### **Prayer to St Francis of Assisi and Blessed Carlo Acutis**

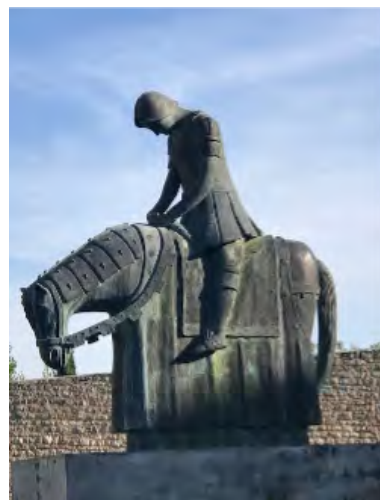
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Church of San Sabino where St Francis was told to return to Assisi



St Francis on his return to Assisi from Spoleto

## DAY FOUR

“Rebuild my church” – the Cross at San Damiano drinks deep into the search, prayer and openness of Francis.

Initially, it is interpreted that he must physically repair and rebuild the churches of San Damiano and Saint Peter that we now know as the Porziuncola but the Lord was calling him to live a life of radical poverty and holiness within the Church so that she may shine forth the beauty of the love and humility of Jesus. It was only in that poverty that Carlo also touched in his apostolic initiatives that Christ could shine forth and be truly adored. Both were obedient and dutiful sons of the Church but their love of Jesus flowed out in mysterious and evangelising ways without neither asking for it. They did not go out to convert and to evangelise in obvious ways, but rather to adore and love Jesus. May we, in this Novena, desire only to love Jesus and be humble so that He may do with me what He will.

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**The Cross of San Damiano**



## DAY FIVE

The Church of La Spogliazone is particularly poignant for our journey with Francis and Carlo.

It is here that the partially incorrupt body of Carlo can be visited and it is the place that Francis stood naked before the Bishop. His father, Peter, was incensed with what he considered the irresponsibility of Francis in discarding and giving away precious silks and other cloths. He demanded full restitution from Francis in front of the Bishop. It is now the point in his life that he declares “I will willingly appear before the Lord Bishop who is the Father and Lord of souls”. It was from this moment that his true Lord and Father was to be found in Heaven and it was from that relationship that he concretises his belonging to Heaven. Throughout his life, up to this moment, he had received many graces and inspirations – all of which were directing him to this moment but now he abandons himself completely to divine providence and the mind of the Church. He is free to adore God without condition and to grow in his love of Jesus. This is a journey that will find its perfection in the events to unfold on the Mountain of La Verna. Carlo almost by divine inspiration is so wedded to the Eucharist and inspired by the example of Francis, is ready for the same journey of fidelity, illness and an early death.

Let us pray for the freedom that comes from knowing the Will of God which is different for all of us but at its centre, is the call to fall in love with God's love for us. Let that be our inspiration.

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Blessed Carlo Acutis



The Church of La Spogliazone

## DAY SIX

The first crib or presepio, is to be found at Greccio. One Christmas Eve, Francis had asked the Pope if he could reenact the scene of the nativity from Bethlehem by bringing an ass and ox, along with straw, a manger and a baby child. At the Mass that evening, Francis as the Deacon, preached to the first crib and to the Altar on which were set the Sacred Vessels for the celebration of the Holy Mass. Francis was consumed by the true reality of the incarnation, namely that God had become fully man in our history and our world. His love of Christ and belief in God's intervention in our world caused him to praise creation in his most famous hymn – "Praise the Lord Brother Son Sister Moon". His intense experience of Christ speaking to him and seeing God present in our world made everything that he touched and experienced, so vivid, real and charged with the presence of God. This Christmas night was no exception and it is said that the baby came to life during the celebration of the Holy Mass. In this precious scene, we see profound adoration both of the Christ Child and the sacred species upon the Altar. From this seminal moment, devotion to the crib has spread throughout the world down all the centuries to the present. There is something so divine about Francis' teaching and life that opens us all to the presence of God.

Let us pray in our lives for this profound adoration for it is only when we truly adore God, do we become alive to the Gospel and our call to share it with our brothers and sisters.

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St Francis adoring the Crib in Greccio

## DAY SEVEN

La Verna has to be an essential part of our Novena to Francis. It was here that he received the stigmata namely the wounds into his hands, feet and side so that he was evermore united to the person of the suffering and glorified Christ. He had asked for two graces. The first being that he should experience something of Christ's mercy, love and compassion for the world and the second, is that he should be in some way part of his suffering. Francis retired to the mountain in preparation for the Feast of Saint Michael and the Archangels and he received this mark of love around the 13th September 1624. Unsurprisingly, he did everything to hide this most special privilege from God but his companions knew what had happened. In some ways, it was another mark of his suffering which coloured his life as he emptied himself in ever greater love for Jesus. The more that he loved his Lord the more that his Lord showed himself to Francis. As we are invited to love Jesus more and to experience this invitation to humility, the more that we become like Him and are a sign to the world of Eucharistic love.

The celebration of Holy Mass that Francis and Carlo were so united and joined to, is an outpouring of the love of Jesus. In a sense, it is a marriage bond – Christ comes to us in love and we are invited to go to Him and as we do so, we turn our back upon the world and prefer nothing to the love of Christ. This means that we have to empty ourselves of that which is divided and sinful but that is the way of the saints and the way of Carlo and Francis. As we live this Novena, how can I join myself to and be evermore closely united to the Cross of Jesus and in so doing, the Mass will become ever more real. I also pray for those who do not know this truth.

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La Verna



## DAY EIGHT

Rieti and the blindness of Francis. As so often with our saints, they are called to empty themselves and literally to become empty receptacles for the life of Christ. The stronger that bond becomes the more that the light of Christ can shine out into our world. Francis, a few months previously, had received the stigmata and we do not know how much pain he carried with him but probably not dissimilar to Padre Pio but also marked his body at this time with his blindness and in a beautiful picture at Greccio, one can see a frail and weakened Francis with his stigmata and dabbing his more than imperfect eyes with a rag. Everything in the physical body of Francis was going wrong but he was becoming ever more transparent to Christ. Remember how we often say that Francis is like a mirror of God to our world and as we see him in this accompanying picture, the story is very clear. Francis was consumed with love for Christ and therefore his journey of physical suffering was not so much pain but joy for he could radiate the love of Christ ever more abundantly. It was also at this time that he wrote Brother Sun, Sister Moon in which he praised God in His creation.

Let us pray for an understanding of what prevents us from being full of joy and praising God.

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St Francis & his blindness and stigmata

## DAY NINE

It was at Saint Mary of the Angels otherwise known as Porziuncola that Francis died. He asked to be laid on the floor with few clothes on for he wanted to go naked to God as he had come naked from God. This was not some false piety but a deep understanding of how as we bring nothing into the world, we can take nothing out, save for our love of Jesus and our desire to be humble like Him. The Church, the City of Assisi and Rome knew that someone had gone to God who was specially chosen to show forth the life of Jesus. When we look at Francis, many would say we are looking at Christ.

As we conclude this Novena, let us pray in the spirit of Francis and Carlo who were united in their love and adoration of God, of how they had experienced His most immense love and of how they wanted to bring others to drink deep of that truth.

Let us pray that we may be so infused by Francis and Carlo that we may be ready to go out and live their love and humility.

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The tomb of St Francis of Assisi