

**Homily for Catholic Schools Week Masses
January 27-29, 2026**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As your Bishop, it is good to be with you for this Mass celebrating Catholic Schools Week. The theme for Catholic Schools Week 2026 is, “Normal Lives, Called to Holiness.” Sometimes we might think that being holy is something beyond our capabilities because we are just normal people. If we look at the lives of the saints, we see that they were normal people, too, but lived in a way that was pleasing to God because they followed His commandments rather than a sinful way of life.

This year’s theme, “Normal Lives, Called to Holiness,” was inspired by the example of two young men who died not too long ago and were canonized saints by Pope Leo XIV last September 7th, Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis.

Pier Giorgio Frassati was born in Turin, Italy on April 6, 1901. His mother, Adelaide Ametis, was a painter. His father Alfredo, was the founder and director of the newspaper, “*La Stampa*,” and was influential in Italian politics, holding positions as an Italian Senator and Ambassador to Germany. At the age of 17, Pier Giorgio joined the St. Vincent de Paul

Society and dedicated much of his spare time to serving the sick and the needy, caring for orphans, and assisting the demobilized servicemen returning from World War I. He decided to become a mining engineer, studying at the Royal Polytechnic University of Turin, so he could “serve Christ better among the miners,” as he told a friend. Mountain climbing was one of his favorite sports. Outings in the mountains, which he organized with his friends, also served as opportunities for his apostolic work. He never lost the chance to lead his friends to Mass, to the reading of Scripture, and to praying the rosary. He often went to the theater, to the opera, and to museums. He loved art and music, and could quote whole passages of the poet Dante. Just before receiving his university degree, Pier Giorgio contracted poliomyelitis, which doctors later speculated he caught from the sick whom he tended. Neglecting his own health because his grandmother was dying, Pier Giorgio died at the age of 24 on July 4, 1925. His mortal remains were found completely intact and incorrupt upon their exhumation on March 31, 1981; they were transferred from the family tomb to the cathedral in Turin following his beatification in 1990. Many pilgrims, especially students and the young, come to the tomb of Saint Pier Giorgio Frassati to seek favors and the courage to follow his example.¹

Carlo Acutis was born on May 3, 1991, in London, to Andrea Acutis and Antonia Salzano. From a young age, Carlo displayed a profound love for God and the Church. Known for his deep devotion to the Catholic faith and his adept use of technology to share religious content, Carlo Acutis is regarded as the first millennial saint. He used his computer skills and internet savvy to help his family put together a website documenting Eucharistic miracles worldwide and an exhibition on Eucharistic miracles that has gone on to be displayed at thousands of parishes on five continents. His spiritual director has attested that Carlo was personally convinced that the scientific evidence from Eucharistic miracles would help people to realize that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist and come back to Mass. He passed away in 2006 at the age of 15 due to leukemia. His beatification took place in October 2020, and the recognition of a second miracle marked the final phase in his path towards sainthood. Carlo Acutis is celebrated not only for his piety but also for his ability to integrate his faith with modern technology, resonating deeply with young Catholics around the globe.²

In his homily at the Mass for their canonization, Pope Leo said, “Saints Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis are an invitation to all of us, especially young people, not to squander our lives, but to direct them

upwards and make them masterpieces. They encourage us with their words: 'Not I, but God,' as Carlo used to say. And Pier Giorgio: 'If you have God at the center of all your actions, then you will reach the end.' This is the simple but winning formula of their holiness. It is also the type of witness we are called to follow, in order to enjoy life to the full and meet the Lord in the feast of heaven."³

It is fitting during this Catholic Schools Week that we celebrate the feast days of three saints who were influential in the education of young people.

Tuesday, January 27th, is the feast day of Saint Angela Merici, the foundress of the Ursuline Sisters, the first teaching order especially for poor young girls. She sought to spread the Gospel to families through the education of future wives and mothers. Saint Angela died in northern Italy in 1540.

Wednesday, January 28th, is the feast day of Saint Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican Priest who wrote many works of theology, the most famous of which is his *Summa Theologiae*, or summation of theology. He is the patron saint of Catholic schools, colleges, universities, philosophers, theologians, and booksellers. Saint Thomas Aquinas died in 1274.

Saturday, January 31st, is the feast day of Saint John Bosco, who founded the Salesians, a community dedicated to educating youth. He was a pioneer in vocational training and was the first saint in history to be interviewed by the press. He was also the first canonized saint in whose honor a national holiday was declared in Italy. He is patron saint of editors and is known as the “Apostle of Youth.” Saint John Bosco died in northern Italy in 1888.

We pray for Saint Pier Giorgio Frassati, Saint Carlo Acutis, Saint Angela Merici, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Saint John Bosco to ask God for the graces we need to make our Catholic schools places that form individuals who know that their lives have a purpose and a calling, namely the call to holiness, and where education is a path not only to knowledge and maturity but to sainthood.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ <https://frassatiusa.org/frassati-biography>

² <https://www.catholic.com/tract/the-life-of-carlo-acutis-biography-legacy-and-devotion> and <https://www.ewtnnews.com/world/europe/who-was-carlo-acutis-a-cna-explainer>

³ <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250907-omelia-frassati-acutis.html>