If someone were to ask you if you wanted to go to heaven, I think most all of us would say well yes, of course, that is the most important thing. But inevitably, we all sometimes get lost along the way. We lose sight of what really matters, or we fall back into old ways, and if we aren't careful, our faith can just become one thing among many as our priorities get messed up.

And this is why it is so important for all of us to remember it takes work to be a disciple and follow Jesus. Which means looking at ourselves, but then not being afraid to help shepherd one another as we try to lead others to Jesus.

Last weekend, Blessed Carlo Acutis was scheduled to be canonized in a formal Mass at Saint Peters; it was delayed due to the death of Pope Francis, but will soon take place.

You might not know the story of one of our newest saints to be, but Carlos only lived to be a teenager - but in that, he used the grace God gave him to become an incredible shepherd to people all around him.

Carlo was born in 1991 in London, and he moved to Milan. He was the only child of a well-to-do family, and had what you might call the good life; he had friends, pets, access to travel and wealth. He loved karate, skiing, basketball, canoeing and walking his dogs. He was also really into computers, and had his own PC and became skilled at computer programing and videography.

However, there was also something different about him in that he had this deep love for God that came from wanting to listen to the Good Shepherd and help others to follow Him.

His mother said that already at the age of 4, they saw something special in him; he was generous and caring, but as a little boy, he wanted to enter into every church they walked in front of.

His parents were actually not practicing. His mom, Antonia, openly admitted by the time he was born, she had been to Mass three times in her life; these were all part of school functions she was at. In a recent interview she said she was “far away” from the church after being raised in a household where no one went to Mass. She would later say “Carlo for me

was a savior.” What happened was he became a shepherd to his mother and so many others.

Carlo came to know a little more about Jesus through his nanny who was Polish and also when he would go to school. Learning about who Jesus is and how much he was loved, he wanted to do something special with his life for God to shepherd others.

And so, from an early age, he started evangelizing. He would ask his parents deep questions about God that his mom and dad could not answer.

His mom said “He pushed me to do research and to read. I began to take theology courses and reflect on life. I discovered the beauty of my faith. We are all on a journey in the spiritual life, but because of Carlo, I was inspired to start that journey. Carlo saved me.”

He made his first communion at the age of 7, and from that day until the day he died, he actually went to Mass every day. He would pray the Rosary every day and take part in adoration of the Eucharist, where we have a special cross that holds the Eucharist called a monstrance, and spend time

in quiet prayer reflecting on how much Jesus cares for us and is with us. His mom also said he would read the Bible every day, and also the Catechism that was put together by Saint Pope John Paul II." His mom said that for Carlo the Bible was his compass. And by the time he was just 11, he was teaching catechism to younger children. And he would use the Internet to continue to evangelize.

His mom said that in 1998, when he was just 7, he became fascinated with computer programming. He begged his mom to help him find books on programing, so she got him books from the university on C++. He learned how to code in several languages, and he taught himself everything, including 3-D animation. He also learned Java, Adobe and Photoshop.

But he didn't use this to become an expert at Call of Duty of Minecraft. Rather he used his computer skills to spread the Catholic faith. He had a particular devotion to the Eucharist, and he developed a website on Eucharistic miracles, which he worked on for four years. He said "The Eucharist is my highway to heaven" and "If we get in front of the sun, we get sun tans, but when we get in front of Jesus in the Eucharist, we become saints." The website has a compilation of 196 stories of Eucharistic

miracles. His mom called it “the light side of the internet,” meaning that as we all know the internet has many dark places - but this was meant to help people on their faith journey. His mother said he wanted to help people understand how much Jesus loves them. In her words: “He [Carlo] understood there was a lack of faith. He used to say there are thousands of people going in front of a concert, in front of a football match. I don't see them in front of the Tabernacle, where there is the house of Jesus that is really present among us…So he used the internet for goodness. He lived all the dangers the young people and all the people are living now. But he was able to dominate, to be free, always to maintain his freedom, not to become a slave [to it]."

He also developed exhibits on the Virgin Mary, on angels and demons and created websites for his Milan parish and for local Jesuits to encourage volunteers. He recognized, said his mom, that the internet can be used for good or bad, and that if we aren’t careful it can diminish the human person. He believed the internet could claim a “tyranny” over a soul and become an addiction; she said he never wanted to waste time, and so while he’d enjoy things like video games, he limited his time on his PlayStation to an hour a week because he wanted to focus on the more important things. He

believed that sadness came when people turned into themselves and that happiness came when they turned toward God. He was very humble; he didn't even like selfies of himself and when his "Eucharistic Miracles" exhibit went to the Vatican he didn't even want his name on the exhibit. He thought it was odd you would wait in a long line to get tickets to a concert, but then in front of the tabernacle, where Jesus is present, he couldn't understand why so many churches were empty.

He prayed a lot for others; he would make sacrifices too for others and during the winter when it would get cold, he would go out to bring food and hot liquids to the homeless. With his weekly allowance, he bought covers and sleeping bags for them.

He also cared about the other kids at school. He had many friends and would help other kids with homework, especially if they needed help in computer science. He looked out for kids who were bullied, and he tried to be close to those whose parents were going through a divorce. He treated girls with a particular "old fashioned" respect that reminded the other boys this is how we treat and look at girls. Whenever he saw someone who

needed help, he leapt into action. He would also defend his faith, including his pro-life views, in class.

At just the age of 15, the family got the shock of their life when he was diagnosed with acute leukemia which took his life in just 3 days after thinking he had just a flu. Sensing that he might not be here on earth long, he told his parents he was offering up his suffering for the Pope and Church.

His sudden death sent shockwaves because people knew and loved him; and at his funeral were so many who his parents did not know who came because of the difference that he made for them. The funeral filled the church and overflowed into the streets of Milan. There were well-dressed teenagers from his Jesuit high school mixed with homeless people and countless foreign doormen including people of others faiths. These were people his parents didn't know Carlo knew who he had befriended on his walks home from school. Immediately after his death, calls to declare him a saint started coming in; his classmates wrote of his life and hundreds of people have told of miracles, graces and favors from asking for his intercession. A boy halfway across the world in Brazil born with a rare

congenital anatomic anomaly of the pancreas was unable to eat solid food; his pastor announced a novena to Carlo in 2013, and three days later the boy was healed. This was the miracle accepted by the Vatican for his Beatification.

He continues to impact this world in so many ways through the writings and website he put together, and as the archbishop of Milan put it, he was a holy person in the digital age. He had studies, sports, computer programing and many things in his life, but he put together a daily life centered on his faith.

He followed the Good Shepherd because he listened to the good shepherd; and his whole love was about evangelization. I love his story because it is a reminder to us that we do the same - but it takes work.

On this third Sunday of Easter, we also celebrate our First Communions here at Saint Joes, and in just a few days a number of our younger parishioners will be celebrating confirmation at the Cathedral. And all of these are a reminder that discipleship - following Jesus - takes work.

Peter is front and center in the Gospel, and he is having what I think could best be described as an “Hakuna Matata” moment - a reference to the philosophy Simba followed briefly in the Lion King when he was running away from his problems, just living for the moment. Peter has gone back to fishing, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But he is taking it easy, and the Gospel tells us he is “lightly clad.” Again, most would dress informally when fishing. But the deeper meaning here is Peter has kind of not wanted to face the past - how he denied Jesus, how he messed up. And so what happens is Jesus comes to him, and then Peter comes to the Lord, getting dressed. What we see here is yet another example of the Lords Love. There is no shaming; rather there is just mercy. And this is always the starting point. We all do things we are not proud of. We all make mistakes. Jesus though will always love us and be there for us. The challenge on our part is to not ignore those parts of our lives we don’t like, but rather to just be honest with ourselves about what we want to change, and remember that when we come forward to receive Holy Communion, be it the first time or 850th time, this is Jesus coming to us where we are at with His love. On our part, what we need is just a bit of maturity that says yes Jesus, I do love you, but here is where I need your love to shine on my soul by owning up to what it is we battle.

With that, we look at ourselves and ask where have we become a little spiritually lazy. Note Carlo's mom - a good mom, a loving mom - but she admitted she had not gone to Mass in some time. Sometimes in our lives we don't do big sins so to say, but stuff just creeps in - we become expectant, self-serving, we put down others, we become arrogant, we don't treat others with love as much as we should, we just kind of stop praying. Like Peter just relaxing on the boat, that's how we can become too. Remember, faith requires a response.

But then, remember Jesus is also saying to us what he said to Peter and what he said to Carlo - feed my lambs. Evangelization can sound like hard work, but this is what we are called to do. Remember this is what Mass, and Communion, and our Confirmation, all prepare us to do. To go and make a difference. Carlo fell in love with Jesus, and look at what he did. First, he evangelized his family, encouraging his parents to come to Mass. Think of the difference we can make in a family. A parent who shows humility and apologizes to their child or their spouse if they raised their voice or got too upset; the love of a mom or dad in spending time with their children or helping them with homework. But also think of what kids can do

too. For instance, sometimes I hear confessions of children, and as I've said the one thing that I always make sure to explain to children is if they confess they missed mass, the last time I checked a 10 year old does not have the ability to get a drivers license. Often a family may get so busy with things and Mass becomes bi-weekly, then monthly. What I do is to remind kids that they too can do what Carlos did - maybe encourage mom and dad to go to Mass as a family. Or to ask mom and dad if they would like to pray before going to bed. They can help a younger sibling with homework, or take initiative to do some chores around the house to help out the family, or do something for an elderly relative or neighbor. All of these things are evangelization. And then of course like Carlo, we remember that feeding the lambs is something we do in daily life. Carlo used his gifts and went out and helped so many through his website. Think of what we do when are invite people to Mass, when we talk about our faith, when we do acts of mercy like going to help people in need, or stand up when someone is being bullied or gossiped about. Each of us has the power to bring people to Jesus, if only we use that power God has given us.

Being a disciple is not easy. Jesus reminds Peter that when he was young, he would go where he wanted, but when he was older, someone would

dress him and take him where he did not want to go. What this means is there will be suffering ahead for him, but all us need to remember there is a spiritual maturity that comes with following Jesus. He loves us so much, and the big moments on our journey - our First Communion Day, our Confirmation Day - these are worthy to celebrate with pictures, with cake and a party. But as Archbishop Flynn would often say at every confirmation, it's not just a Kodak Moment. Rather it you and me making a statement - namely that Jesus, I love you, and that Jesus, I will follow you. In just a few moments we'll come forward and welcome Jesus into our hearts, and in so doing we'll also be receiving love and mercy. Let's make sure this isn't just something mechanical but something that is just as special as the day we made our first communion. For in receiving Jesus, like Peter we are saying we love Him and that we want to follow Him. Sometimes we will stray, but he will always be there to show us the right way. On our part, let's do what we can to stay on the path and help others to find it to by extending God's love to all the world.