23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Tomorrow / Today] Pope Leo [canonizes / canonized] two saints born at the beginning and end of the twentieth century and who gained considerable popularity in our time. Pier Giorgio Frassati was born in Turin, Italy, in 1901. An athletic young man, he devoted his life to helping the sick and the poor, an interest he had developed from his childhood. He understood that assisting the needy required social reform, for which he generously advocated. In 1925, while boating with a couple of friends, he experienced sharp back pains that grew worse. He was diagnosed with poliomyelitis and died one month later at the age of 24.

In 1991, Carlo Acutis was born in London of Italian parents who then moved to Milan. His family was not especially religious, but Carlo possessed deep devotion as a young child, especially to the Eucharist. He was a good student, a loving friend, a catechist at the age of 12, and a bit of a techno-geek. He was developing his web site of information on eucharistic miracles and apparitions of Mary in 2006 when he got an inflammation of the throat. He was diagnosed with acute promyelocytic leukemia and died eleven days later at the age of 15. These two saints serve as role models especially for young people wanting to develop their interior spiritual life or invite others to join in the work of social reform. They each wasted no time in their young lives to put their strongest-held beliefs into practice. Neither of them realized how short their lives would be until just before they died. But they were already using well the number of their days.

One verse of today's responsorial psalm prays for this kind of insight: "[O Lord,] Teach us to number our days, that we may gain wisdom of heart." That prayer responds to a rhetorical question in the first reading from Wisdom, which many people ask when they wonder why they were born: "Who can conceive what the Lord intends?" The psalm also prepares for the gospel, where Jesus advises how to gain wisdom of heart. He cautions that discipleship works if we are willing to plan ahead for its costs, renounce unnecessary possessions, amass the right resources, anticipate family misunderstandings, and revise our own goal. We frequently don't know when we begin a project what it will cost or how long it will take, but we can make preparations that aim for success and brace for challenges. This applies to work, relationships and faith. Long-term projects are worth undertaking, even if we may not live long enough to complete them. When a talented person's life is cut short, it's heartbreaking. But, like Saints Pier Giorgio and Carlo, a short life may achieve other successes beyond what the person was planning. Planning the right way produces its own good, even if personally we never see the results.

None of us knows the number of our days, but we each sense God has something in mind for how we use them. Discipleship comes with costs. It demands vision for the future and sacrifice in the present. Our two new saints will inspire people in every age group to treasure the day at hand and to work for a better future. We may not accomplish it all ourselves, but we can contribute toward the larger plan that God has conceived.