

A 17th-century monastery in northern Italy where recently canonized St. Carlo Acutis received his first Communion is seen in flames as firefighters try to contain the fire Oct. 11, 2025. The Bernaga Monastery, located in the La Valletta Brianza municipality in the Lombardy region, was home to 22 Ambrosian-rite cloistered nuns, all of whom survived the devastating blaze. (OSV/Courtesy of Lombardy firefighters)

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A 17th-century monastery in northern Italy where recently canonized St. Carlo Acutis received his first Communion was in ruins after a massive fire ravaged the historic building.

According to Italian news outlet Rai News, the fire broke out Oct. 11 at the Bernaga Monastery, located in the La Valletta Brianza municipality in the Lombardy region.

The fire spread rapidly through the monastery, which was primarily constructed of wood and suffered significant damage. While investigations are ongoing, Marco Panzeri, the mayor of La Valletta Brianza, suspected a short circuit may have caused the fire, Rai News reported.

In a statement published Oct. 13, Archbishop Mario Delpini of Milan announced that all 22 Ambrosian-rite cloistered nuns residing at the monastery had survived the devastating blaze.

"The merciless fire destroyed a heritage of documentation, signs of devotion, and the few personal belongings the nuns lived with," Delpini said. "In this disaster, I want to express the solidarity of the entire Ambrosian Church and my closeness and prayer. I know the nuns will continue to pray and that faith in God will be the most necessary encouragement."

The archdiocese also published a message on behalf of the Ambrosian-rite consecrated men and women who expressed their solidarity with the cloistered nuns at the loss of their home. The Ambrosian rite is a liturgical tradition particular to Milan.

"This unexpected and painful event occurred shortly after the Jubilee of Consecrated Life and on the eve of the liturgical memorial of Saint Carlo Acutis, who received his First Communion in the church of your monastery. May the example of his faith and the prayers of many sustain you, giving you consolation and hope," the statement read.

Citing an interview with a person close to the nuns who chose to remain anonymous, local news site Lecco Today reported that the fire occurred while most of the nuns were gathered in a room watching a live broadcast of the Rosary for Peace presided over by Pope Leo XIV in St. Peter's Square.

According to the source, a nun left to check on a fellow sister who was ill and saw the fire, alerting everyone at the monastery.

"If it hadn't been for her, they would all have gone to heaven," the source said, according to Lecco Today.

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Firefighters fought the blaze until the following day and also managed to save several works of art and relics housed in the monastery, including a reliquary that housed a first-class relic of hair belonging to St. Carlo Acutis, who was canonized Sept. 7 by Leo.

Italian news agency ANSA reported that rescuers are still searching for a crucifix that was gifted to the nuns by St. Paul VI.

The fire occurred on the eve of the first celebration of St. Carlo Acutis' feast day, Oct. 12.

According to the archdiocese, from a young age, St. Carlo was "fond of the nuns" at the monastery. It was there that he was introduced to Bishop Pasquale Macchi. The bishop had once served as secretary to the former archbishop of Milan, Cardinal

Giovanni Montini, who later became Pope Paul VI after his election to the papacy.

It was Bishop Macchi, the archdiocese said, that informed St. Carlo's parents that the 7-year-old future saint was ready for his first Communion.

"Carlo remained deeply attached to the nuns: every time he returned to visit them, he entrusted himself to their prayers, asking them to help him accomplish what God wanted for him," the archdiocese said.

"Many saw a further sign of his affection in the fact that on Saturday, the same day a Mass was celebrated in the same church and a relic of his was present, no nuns were killed in the fire," the statement read.