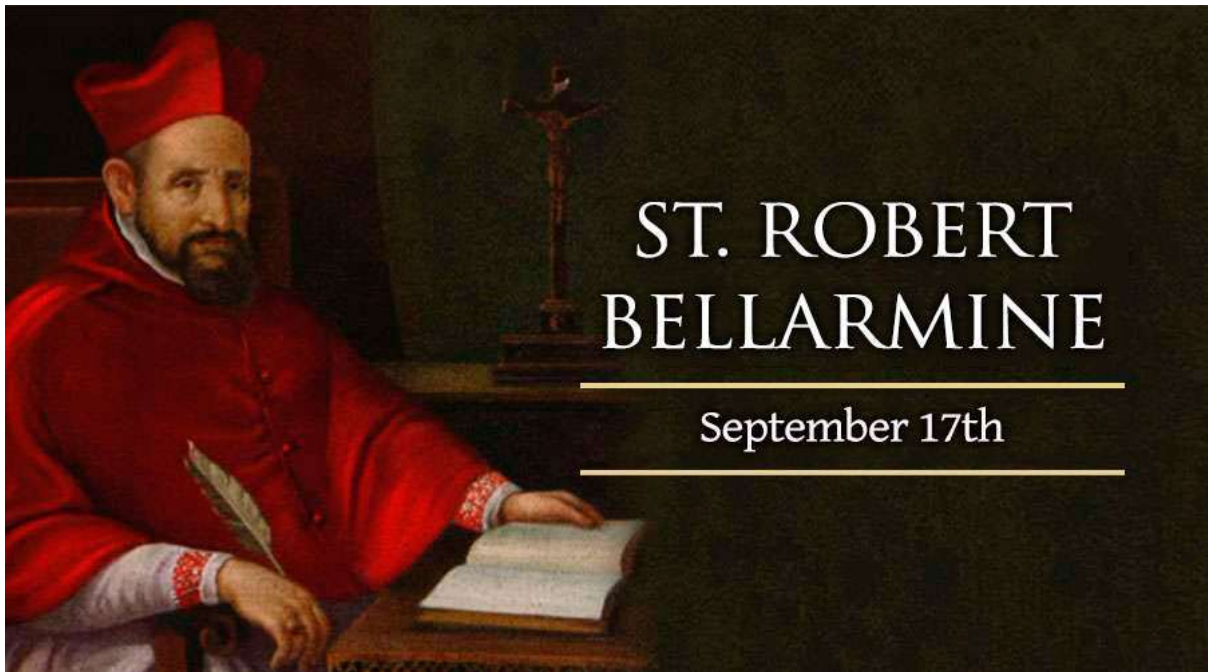


St. Robert Bellarmine



On Sept. 17, the Catholic Church celebrates the Italian cardinal and theologian St. Robert Bellarmine. One of the great saints of the Jesuit order, St. Robert has also been declared a Doctor of the Church and the patron of catechists. Robert Bellarmine was born on October 4, 1542 in the Tuscan town of Montepulciano. His uncle was a cardinal who later became Pope Marcellus II. As a young man, Robert received his education from the Jesuit order, which had received written papal approval only two years before his birth.

In September of 1560, Robert entered the Jesuit order himself. He studied philosophy for three years in Rome, then taught humanities until 1567, when he began a study of theology that lasted until 1569. The final stage of his training emphasized the refutation of Protestant errors. Robert received ordination to the priesthood in Belgium, where his sermons drew crowds of both Catholics and Protestants. In 1576, he returned to Italy and took up an academic position addressing theological controversies. The resulting work, his "Disputations," became a classic of Catholic apologetics.

Near the end of the 1580s, the esteemed theologian became "Spiritual Father" to the Roman College. He served as a guide to St. Aloysius Gonzaga near the end of the young Jesuit's life, and helped produce the authoritative Latin text of the Bible called for by the recent Council of Trent. Around the century's end Robert became an advisor to Pope Clement VIII. The Pope named him a cardinal in 1599, declaring him to be the most educated man in the Church. Robert played a part in a debate between Dominicans and Jesuits regarding grace, though the Pope later decided to appoint and consecrate him as the Archbishop of Capua.

The cardinal archbishop's three years in Capua stood out as an example of fidelity to the reforming spirit and decrees of the Council of Trent. He was considered as a possible Pope in two successive elections, but the thought of becoming Pope disturbed him and in the end he was never chosen. In the early years of the 17th century, the cardinal took a public stand for

the Church's freedom when it came under attack in Venice and England. He also attempted, though not successfully, to negotiate peace between the Vatican and his personal friend Galileo Galilei, over the scientist's insistence that not only the earth, but the entire universe, revolved around the sun.

Cardinal Bellarmine retired due to health problems in the summer of 1621. Two years before, he had set out his thoughts on the end of earthly life in a book titled "The Art of Dying Well." In that work, the cardinal explained that preparing for death was life's most important business, since the state of one's soul at death would determine the person's eternal destiny.

St. Robert Bellarmine died on September 17, 1621. Pope Pius XI canonized him in 1931, and declared him to be a Doctor of the Church.