

Mass for the Memorial of Saint Robert Bellarmine

I. Introduction

What a joy it is for me to return here to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, which holds so many wonderful memories for me, and I'm grateful to you, Msgr. Rossi, for the kind invitation to celebrate this Mass. On a personal note, Saint Robert Bellarmine, whose feast we celebrate today, is the saint whose name I took at my Confirmation. He has always been a spiritual and intellectual hero to me, and he has much to say to us today. For just a moment, let's think about that, and what it means for us.

II. A Great Love has Been Offered Us

Robert Bellarmine was an extraordinarily talented young man. He was born to a life of privilege and, while still in his teens, he already knew most of Virgil's writings, in Latin, by heart. The world was at his feet, and yet deep in his soul he heard the voice of the Divine Master calling him to joyfully leave the world behind and to give his considerable energy and ability for the greater glory of God and for the salvation of souls.

Bellarmino was called to the priestly service of the Church during a time of great turbulence and intellectual confusion, in some ways like our own. His contributions to helping people understand the Faith were enormous. In fact, he personally wrote two catechisms which were in use in the Church for centuries, and are consulted even today. Yet the holiness of his life, and his love for Jesus Christ, truly present in the Eucharist, was his most eloquent "writing" of all.

He was a living embodiment of the words of Saint Paul in today's reading from his Letter to Timothy: that a bishop must be "temperate, self-controlled, decent, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not aggressive, but gentle, not contentious, not a lover of money."

Yet he was also a living embodiment of the words of Pope Francis in the encyclical letter *Lumen Fidei*, in which the Holy Father writes: "In God's gift of faith, a

supernatural infused virtue, we realize that a great love has been offered us, a good word has been spoken to us, and that when we welcome that word, Jesus Christ the Word made flesh, the Holy Spirit transforms us, lights up our way to the future and enables us joyfully to advance along that way on wings of hope. Thus wonderfully interwoven, faith, hope and charity are the driving force of the Christian life as it advances towards full communion with God."

Through the gift of faith, and through his cooperation with grace, Robert Bellarmine arrived at that full communion with God. Today, at his own request, the body of *Saint* Robert Bellarmine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church, rests beneath a side altar at the Church of Sant' Ignazio in Rome, just a few steps from the tomb of his student and spiritual directee, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga.

III. If You are Wise

With characteristic brilliance, in his treatise entitled "On the Ascent of the Mind to God," St. Robert Bellarmine helps us to see our life of faith, and the priorities which flow from living it, in the clearest possible terms. In words which echo down through the centuries, words which apply incisively to all of us, he writes: "If you are wise, then, know that you have been created for the glory of God and your own eternal salvation. This is your goal; this is the center of your life; this is the treasure of your heart. If you reach this goal, you will find happiness. If you fail to reach it, you will find misery." He continues ... "May you consider truly good whatever leads to your goal and truly evil whatever makes you fall away from it. Prosperity and adversity, wealth and poverty, health and sickness, honors and humiliations, life and death, in the mind of the wise man, are not to be sought for their own sake, nor avoided for their own sake. But if they contribute to the glory of God and your eternal happiness, then they are good and should be sought. If they detract from this, they are evil and must be avoided."

So as we approach the Altar of God to celebrate the same Eucharistic Sacrifice from which all the Saints drew strength each day, let us ask in faith: As we celebrate the divine mysteries, O Lord, we pray, may the Holy Spirit fill us with that light of faith by which he constantly enlightened Saint Robert Bellarmine for the spreading of your glory. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.