St. Charles *Borromeo*



Feast Day: 4 November

Patron of: bishops, catechists, seminarians, and spiritual directors

AT A GLANCE

- Born 2 October 1538 at Arona, on Lake Maggiore
- Made a cardinal in his early twenties, before he was a priest
- Ordained priest in 1563
- Archbishop of Milan, who stayed with his people through the plague of 1576
- Died 3 November 1584

HIS STORY

Charles Borromeo had every door open. His problem was choosing which one to walk through.

Born into a wealthy family, Charles seemed destined for privilege and influence. When his uncle became Pope Pius IV in 1559, Charles was made a cardinal at just 22, before he was even a priest.

But Charles knew the dangers of life at the Roman court. He sought advice from an older archbishop and even considered leaving everything behind for a monastery.

Then his elder brother Federico died. Pressured to leave Church life and take charge of the family, Charles faced a defining choice. He chose the priesthood and was ordained in 1563.

Charles also helped his uncle bring the long-stalled Council of Trent to completion, holding it together through difficult disputes.

He later oversaw the preparation of the Roman Catechism. As Archbishop of Milan, he put the council's reforms into practice, visiting parishes, opening seminaries and establishing schools to teach children the faith.

Charles had his struggles. He had a speech impediment, was sometimes considered slow and could be demanding and harsh when frustrated by opposition.

Then, in 1576, plague struck Milan. While the governor and many leading citizens fled, Charles stayed. He gathered priests and lay helpers to care for the sick, found shelter for those in need and arranged altars in the streets so people confined to their homes could follow Mass from their windows.

The young man who once considered withdrawing from the world had become a shepherd who refused to abandon his people.

WALKING WITH JESUS

What set him apart was not the offices he held but what he did with them. He turned from wealth and ease to prayer, penance and service.

Encounter

There was no single dramatic moment. Pope Benedict XVI says he looked on Christ's love in the Eucharist and in the Crucified, and that it filled his nights with prayer.

Deepen

His prayer and his work were not separate. He celebrated the liturgy without haste and began reform in his own household. His motto was one word, Humilitas.

Mission

He formed priests, taught children the faith, and went where people were suffering.

"Humilitas" (Humility), his motto.

"Ecce venio" (Behold, I come)
(said at his death after receiving the Eucharist.)

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you gave Charles a heart for the people entrusted to him. Slow me down this week. Mother Mary, help me give my time without hurry to the ones God has put in my care, and to listen as you listen. Saint Charles Borromeo, pray for us.

FAITH IN ACTION

Think of one person you are responsible for teaching, whether a child, a parishioner or a colleague. Give them an unhurried half hour.