



SAINT CHARLES BORROMEIO

October 2, 1538 – November 3, 1584

By *Father Jon Schnobrich*

As a priest, I feel at times the movement within the office I hold. What I mean is, as a priest who acts *in persona Christi*, I have tasted the experience of Christ, the Bridegroom loving his Bride, the Church. I have glimpsed the privilege of being Divine Physician and Good Shepherd. Although, as a baptized member of God's family, I also at times experience the Marian element before God of being Bridal, receptive; when going to confession, I know I'm the sick one who is in need of healing; or when I've put a hundred things before prayer, I'm the lost sheep who needs to be found. Within my experience of the priesthood has been this movement, this fluctuation, back and forth between Christ and His Church.

When one thinks of a 'man of the Church,' often the image of well polished priest comes to mind who is both academic and pastoral, and who has served the Church in some extraordinary way. However, after reading through the story of his life, St. Charles Borromeo takes being a 'man of the Church' to an entirely new level.

For the sake of not repeating all of his remarkable accomplishments, what struck me as noteworthy was the time and state of the Church during the period God called him to service. In modern times we think we have huge problems in the wake of the abuse scandals and cover-ups. Yet in comparison, historically the 16th century was so much worse.

Coming from great wealth and prominence, Charles Borromeo could have easily carved out a very comfortable life for himself. However, answering the call of God, Borromeo voluntarily embraced a life of poverty and asceticism so that he might remain more committed to the life the Council of Trent was asking her priests to live. In his own words, "When we remove all obstacles to his presence he will come, at any hour and moment, to dwell spiritually in our hearts." He tirelessly worked to reform the Church at every level: religious life, clergy, Catechetically, liturgically, in the celebration of the Sacraments, music, in administration, and so much more. He poured out his life for the good of the Church and to bring about the kind of reform she was so desperately in need of.

In considering his life, I wonder if St. Charles Borromeo felt that movement within his priesthood too? If at times as a member of the Church, needing Christ to come and find or heal or strengthen or love him; or at other times, experiencing - as Priest *in persona Christi* - the reality of loving, healing, forming, or finding the Bride, the Church, in her members.

When I was on Theology of the Body II course, I remember the staggering insight that the first human words of the bible manifested the Bridegroom rejoicing in His Bride – "At last, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." Then, St. John writes the last human words of Bible in the final chapter of the book of Revelation which capture the Bride rejoicing in her Bridegroom – "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come. Come. Amen! Come, Lord Jesus,'" Perhaps this is the tension, the movement, which Christ envisioned us to live in throughout our priesthood.

It is recorded that after the Passion of our Lord was read to him, and the prayers for a safe passing were said, St. Charles Borromeo died with his last spoken words being, "*ECCE VENIO*," "Behold, I come."



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