

Reflection Friday Week 31 St Charles Borromeo 2022

St Charles Borromeo (1538 - 1584), a leading figure of the Catholic Reformation, was born near Lake Maggiore, Italy, to a powerful family, being related to the Medici through his mother. As the second son, he was destined for a career in the Church. He received a doctorate in civil and canon law at Pavia University. His uncle, Pope Pius IV, in 1559, summoned him to Rome and made him a cardinal. He became the administrator of the diocese of Milan and protector of the Catholic cantons of Switzerland and of the Franciscans and Carmelites.

He played a large part in the re-opening the Council of Trent in 1562, suspended 10 years earlier. In late 1562 Charles' elder brother died, leaving him as head of the family. His relations wanted him to marry and were supported by the Pope; but Charles disagreed. In 1563, he was secretly ordained a priest and then consecrated Archbishop of Milan. However, the Pope wouldn't let him leave Rome. Charles worked on the Catechism, the Missal and the Breviary, and helped reformed his own diocese through trusted deputies.

Pius IV died and his successor allowed Charles to return to his diocese in 1566. He began reform from the top, giving much of his property to the poor. He set up the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine to teach children the faith. When famine struck, he fed 3,000 people at his own expense for three months and inspired others to do likewise. When the plague came, he prepared himself for death, made his will, and ministered to the worst cases. After enormous nagging, preaching and persuasion, the clergy followed his example. His reforms met with great opposition especially from religious orders. An unsuccessful attempt was even made on his life.

Charles's final visitation was to the cantons of Switzerland in 1583, where he found corruption and abuse. He even dealt with senior priests practising witchcraft and sorcery. His enemies claimed his fight against heresy was a plot to extend Spanish domination into the region. Charles died on 3rd November 1584 aged 46.

A man walks into a bar with a roll of tarmac under his arm and says: *"Pint please, and one for the road."*

I went to the doctors the other day and I said, *'Have you got anything for wind?'* So, he gave me a kite.