

## Reflection Saturday Week 30 St Charles Borromeo 2023

**St Charles Borromeo** (1538-1584) was a leading figure of the Catholic Reformation. Born on the shores of Lake Maggiore in northern Italy, to a powerful family, he was 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 Parvia University. When his uncle was elected Pope Pius IV in 1559, he was summoned to Rome and made a cardinal, then administrator of Milan and protector of the Swiss Catholic cantons, the Franciscans and the Carmelites. He influenced the re-opening of the Council of Trent (1562), suspended since 1552.

In 1562 Charles's elder brother died, leaving him as head of the family. Despite his family's wishes, in 1563, he was secretly ordained a priest then consecrated Archbishop of Milan, but the Pope would not let him leave Rome because he was needed there. He worked on the catechism, the Missal and the Breviary, and reformed his own diocese as well as he could from a distance through trusted deputies.

Pius IV died and in 1566 his successor permitted Charles to return to his diocese. He began reform from the top, giving his property to the poor. He set up the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine to teach children the faith which inspired the Sunday School movement. When famine struck the province, he fed 3,000 people at his own expense for three months and inspired others to do likewise. When plague came, he prepared himself for death, made his will, and went to the hospital where the worst cases were. After enormous amounts of nagging, preaching and persuasion the secular clergy at length followed his example.

The King of Spain, whose jurisdiction included Milan, resisted any diminution of his power, and the next fifteen years there were arrests, excommunications, denunciations, calumnies, and absolutions – ending finally in peace.

Charles's final visitation was of the cantons of Switzerland in 1583, where he had to deal with senior priests practising witchcraft and sorcery, and enemies claiming his fight against heresy was a plot to extend Spanish domination.

Charles died on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1584 at the age of 46.