



## St. Robert Bellarmine

### Doctor of the Church (one of only 36)

**Patron: Catechists and Catechumens**

**Feast Day: September 17**

**Born: October 4, 1542**

**Died: September 17, 1621**

**Beatified: 1832 by Pope Urban VIII**

**Canonized: 1930 by Pope Pius XI**

Robert Bellarmine was born in Italy (southern Tuscany) to noble, but poor, parents Vincenzo and Cinzia Bellarmine. His mother was the sister of Pope Marcellus II. She was dedicated to almsgiving, prayer, meditation, fasting and mortification of the body.

At age 18, St. Robert entered the Jesuit Order. He desired to help the poor and to restore the Church. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Protestants attacked the Church causing many people to fall away from the True Faith. The Church responded with the Counter-Reformation which St. Robert was ardently a part of. His most important work was “Disputation on the Controversies of the Christian Faith.” In this work he demolished the Protestant notion that the Antichrist would be a pope. Citing Scripture, he explained that the “beast” will deny Jesus as the Messiah, will make himself the Christ, will demand to be worshipped and will be accepted by the Jews as the long-awaited Messiah. St. Robert clarified that the pope is the *vicar* of Jesus Christ and counted him among those who “bear testimony to Jesus” whom the dragon will wage war against. Rev 12:13

As professor at the University of Leuven in Belgium, he gained a reputation for preaching. He was small in stature but made a big presence. Crowds would gather to hear him preach. Pope Clement VIII, appointed Bellarmine rector for the Roman College in 1592, examiner of bishops in 1598, cardinal in 1599 and archbishop of Capua in 1602 saying of him, “the Church of God had not his equal in learning.” St. Robert put into effect the reforming decrees of the Council of Trent. He advocated for democratic church-state relations where authority originates with God, but is vested in the people, who entrust it to fit rulers.

St. Robert was famously embroiled in the controversy of the heliocentric theory that the planets move around the sun. The Church interpreted Scripture with the understanding that celestial bodies moved around the Earth. St. Robert cautioned Galileo to say that his findings *support* not *prove* the Copernicus theory until more investigations were conducted. In turn, St. Robert advised the Church not to condemn the discoveries outright. St. Robert could not avert a clash. Galileo, very brash, pressed his viewpoint in a book by interpreting Scripture to support his findings while also making fun of the pope and scientists who disagreed with him. The Office of Inquisition put Galileo on trial and forced him to recant his interpretation of Scripture (not his heliocentric theory). The Church came to agreement with heliocentric theory 12 years after the death of St. Robert.

Bellarmino lived with only the essentials and took a personal interest in the poor. It is reported that he used hangings of his rooms to clothe poor people, remarking, “The walls won’t catch cold.” He died a pauper on 17 September 1621 at age 78. His remains are displayed behind glass under a side altar in the Church of Saint Ignatius, the chapel of the Roman college.

**Quote from St. Bellarmine: *Peace and union are the most necessary of all things for men who live in common, and nothing serves so well to establish and maintain these as the forbearing charity whereby we put up with one another's defects.***

