

FROM FR. JASON



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As the liturgical year draws us to the Solemnity of All Saints and the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed, the Church in her maternal wisdom places before us on November 4 the radiant figure of St. Charles Borromeo, bishop, reformer, and tireless shepherd. Every saint is a word of God spoken to our time, and Charles speaks with particular urgency.

Picture the scene: the year is 1538. In the majestic castle of Arona on Lake Maggiore, a child is born into one of the most powerful families of Renaissance Italy. His uncle will become Pope Pius IV; his future is assured - cardinal at twenty-two, secretary of state, and administrator of vast ecclesiastical revenues. The world offers him everything. Yet, in the silence of prayer, the Word pierces his heart: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor... then come, follow me."

Charles does not negotiate. He liquidates his princely income, distributes it to the poor, and dons the simple black cassock of a working bishop. He exchanges the palaces of Rome for the plague-ridden alleys of Milan. This shows us that the Lord, who delivered Israel from Pharaoh, can deliver us from the Egypt of our ego, our comfort, and our fear of the future. St. Charles teaches us that conversion is not a theory - it is a concrete passing over from death to life.

When Charles arrives in Milan in 1565, the archdiocese is a spiritual desert: absentee priests, illiterate laity, churches in ruins, and superstition rampant. The Protestant Reformation rages to the north; the Catholic response wavers between inertia and violence. What does Charles do? He convokes provincial councils and diocesan synods, yes - but more importantly, he walks. On foot, on mule, and through snow and flood, he visits every parish, every mountain village. He asks one question: "Do you know Jesus Christ crucified and risen?"

He founds the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine - the first systematic catechetical program for children and adults. He establishes seminaries where future priests are formed not as career clerics, but as *alter Christus*, men who will lay down their lives for the sheep. He mandates that every parish have a school of the Word, where the Scriptures are broken open for the simple faithful.

Then comes 1576. The plague strikes Milan with apocalyptic fury. The governor flees. The nobility barricades itself. The city becomes a necropolis. What does the archbishop do? He stays. He pawns silver to buy bread. He organizes teams of priests and lay volunteers to carry the sick, bury the dead, and anoint the dying. He processes barefoot through the streets, carrying the Holy Nail of the Crucifixion, leading the people in a great litany of penance. One chronicler writes: "He seemed another Ambrose, another Augustine, but above all another Christ, who did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Here is the heart of the Gospel we proclaim: the Cross is not a tragedy to be avoided but the tree of life. We can sing even when the doctor gives a bad diagnosis or when a child wanders. St. Charles shows us that pastoral charity is not sentimentality - it is the willingness to enter the plague, to touch the leper, to become poor with the poor, because only thus does the Resurrection break in.

Brothers and sisters, the Church today faces plagues no less deadly: secularism, relativism, the plague of pornography, the plague of loneliness. St. Charles Borromeo rises from the calendar to cry out: "*Ecclesia semper reformanda*!" - the Church must always be reformed, beginning with me and you.

Peace,