

Saint Robert Bellarmine

1542-1621

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(1542-1621), the great Doctor of the Church, in regard to the presence and assistance of the Angels to men, he affirms: “The Guardian Angels protect men from physical and moral dangers.”

Nothing that has to do with men can cease being of interest to them. Everything, in one way or another, regarding our eternal destiny, concerns them: the forces of nature, animal attacks, passions, intrigues, conspiracies, wars, everything can be subject to the intervention decided by an Angel in the moment in which the eternal destiny of God’s friends come into play”.

Saint Robert Bellarmine was born in Montepulciano on October 4, 1542 to a rich family. His mother was the sister of Pope Marcellus II. In spite of his family’s plan for him, he renounced a successful career and in 1560 entered the Society of Jesus. After studying at the Roman College, he specialized in Theology in Padua and in Lovanio. In the first three years of religious life, he suffered from atrocious headaches. In 1570 he was ordained a priest. He was so talented in his studies that the discussion of his thesis in theology lasted three days, admired and esteemed by a vast audience. In 1576 he became the first holder of the apologetic chair of the Roman College, preparing above all, the German and English students that when returned to their countries had to fight in the Protestant Reformation. Among his students was Saint Luigi Gonzaga, who became the spiritual director and would come to aide him in the last moments of his life. From 1592 to 1594 he was Rector of the College. He took care of, first hand, the catechists and he dedicated himself to works of charity, without leaving his studies. Pope Clement VIII, in 1597, wanted him as his theologian, examiner of the bishops and counselor of the then Holy Office. In spite of being ill, he was then called to collaborate in almost every ministry of the Roman Curia, so much so to be defined as “the porter of the curia”. Seeing the ignorance that then ruled in fact the religion not only of the people but of the clergy, he wrote *Big Catechism* and *Small Catechism*, that were distributed all over.

In 1599, perhaps in order to get away from Rome during a period of controversy, he was named Archbishop of Capua and made Cardinal by Clement VIII. He remained in the diocese of Capua from 1602 to 1605. When the Pope died, he came back to Rome and became the official theologian of the Church. He wrote numerous apologetic works, pastorals, asceticisms and moral works, among them, “The Disputes on the Controversies of the Christian Faith”. For his apologetic commitments in favor of the



catholic doctrine, came to be known as “the hammer of the heretics”. In the last years of his life he prepared a work titled, “The Art of Dying Well”, on ways to leave this world peacefully. He was friend and admirer of Galileo, who invited prudence and “is happy to speak of suppositions and not absolutes”. In 1616 he personally notified Galileo of the decree of Tribunal of the Inquisition, which forbade him to sustain as truth the hypothesis of Copernicus. He died on September 17, 1621.