

Haec Dies

This day was made by the Lord: we rejoice - are glad, Alleluia.

It's fitting, I think, during this Easter period of joy with Christ and meditation on the reality of His resurrection for our lives in this world and the next, to think a little about the saints - the forgotten people of modern spirituality. For the saints are, after all, our fellow-Christians who lived a human life here, and have gone before us to be with the risen Christ in glory. They aren't just dead heroes, or maybe anti-heroes: they share with us still, though now on a different plain, the love of Christ, and His risen life which we try to understand a bit better in prayer & contemplation at Easter time. They are part of our community ^{of} members of Christ, the holiest among us undoubtedly, but for that reason the better able to understand and help us live full Christian lives. The example of their own human lives is not the only way they can help us or the only influence & connection they have with us. Still, as people have their favourite heroes or characters from history, it's natural for a Christian to have some interest in people whose Christian lives, in their time, were recognised as outstanding: people whose human qualities coupled with close union with Christ can attract us &, hopefully, inspire us to give ourselves more fully to the service of God. If you have a favourite saint, perhaps you'd like to call on his or her help and patronage as we recite our ~~Midday~~ ^{Midday} Prayers today: PRAYERS

Palustrina
St. P. Marcellus
(R. 181)

As a prayer in song today, I'd like you to listen to the end of one of Palestrina's masterpieces: an appropriate text for the hopes of the world this day particularly of the people of Vietnam - "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant us peace."

Perhaps I'm being unnecessarily involved - but one reason I wanted you to hear that particular work ^{was} that it ^{is} Palestrina's Mass of Pope Marcellus, the Pope who was the maternal uncle of St Robert Bellarmine whose feast-day is today. Robert Bellarmine was canonised and declared a doctor of the Church for his long life of holiness & humility; his great work as a teacher, professor, writer, apologist in the turbulent ~~and~~ years following the Council of Trent and at the height of the Counter-Reformation; his pastoral care and concern as a Bishop; his constant clarity and humanity in all the many official posts he held during his long life, not least, towards the end, as a cardinal and Papal advisor involved in the not always edifying internal politics of Church government. He was a man of great intelligence, charm and urbanity; always fair to his adversaries and their position in his writings on doctrinal controversies and never harsh, uncharitable or personal in his arguments. His stature as a theologian and apologist was great enough to warrant courses of lectures and sermons to counteract his influence in Germany & England, where his name became entrined in the "Bellarmine jug". His physical stature, though, was quite small - so small that he always had to ~~use~~

stand on a stool to ~~stand~~ ^{be seen in} the pulpits of Holland where he first made his name as a preacher & teacher. At Louvain too he began his career as an apologist, opposing the ideas of Baius, to whom the Jansenists later looked as their guide and spiritual mentor. ^{Bellarmino} ~~He~~ later crossed seas, so to speak, with James II of England on the divine right of kings issue; was in contact with Galileo and involved officially, as a Cardinal, in the first Roman examination of Galileo in 1615; then an but two of Bellarmine's many correspondents among the more celebrated names of his day. His work and what he stood for may appear, in these more ecumenical days, to be somewhat of an embarrassment to be too enthusiastic about. Doubtless if he were with us today, he'd be an outstanding theologian again, a very likeable well-known figure, ~~at the~~ ^{to the} ~~forefront~~ ⁱⁿ the cause of Christian unity, and still be causing anxiety ~~to~~ both ^{to} some Catholics and to some Christians of other churches. In fact, we need such a man as he in these days of a certain confusion in the Church - a man of intelligence and great clarity whose concern is for the people of God in the Church of Christ, who knows how to put up with difficulties (one Pope wanted to put one of Bellarmine's books on the Index of forbidden books - he died before he could do so; but Bellarmine didn't fly off the handle and go into tantrums of allegations about persecution, lack of freedom & so on which one unfortunately sometimes hears today from lesser men in similar difficult situations). The Church needs men of his calibre and humanity. Let us pray, with Robert Bellarmine, for them.