

Some soldiers use swords in battle, others use words proving the pen is mightier than the sword.<sup>i</sup> The Jesuit scholar, Robert Bellarmine, studied the history of the church and the writings of the early Church Fathers to deal with the many controversies in the Church following the Protestant Reformation. He helped with a revision of the bible, the systematic structuring of Church Doctrine, and the writing of a Catechism that instructed the faith for generations to come. Popes sent him on missions and used his talents for the good of the church. He was a busy, busy man in service of the Lord.<sup>ii,iii,iv</sup>

In his later years when life was quieter and he had more time for prayer and reflection, he wrote a book on the Art of Dying<sup>v</sup>. Not surprisingly, in order to die well, one must live well. Today's readings certainly highlight this aspect of Bellarmine's thought:

- I prayed, and prudence was given me; I pleaded, and the spirit of Wisdom came to me (Wis 7:7).
- Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life. They are more precious than gold (Jn 6:63, Ps 19:11).
- Everyone who listens to these words of mine [of Jesus] and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock (Mt 7:24).

Bellarmino was surprised that people did not spend more time thinking about death. It is hard to correct a person who chooses to reject God. And so many ignore God that it is hard to count all of them. Nevertheless, death is certain and so is our judgement, so we should act accordingly. Death can come when we least expect it or when we are weak and failing. Thus, in our youth when strong and healthy, we should begin to prepare for the inevitable. Set a course for the finish line and always aim to love others as God loves us. The choices we make throughout life await us at our time of judgement by the Just Judge. So rather than pave the road to hell with good intentions, practice virtue that your actions will speak of a life lived for God and for your neighbor. (Introduction).

To guide the Christian in living a life worthy of the afterlife, Bellarmine sets out sixteen precepts to live well and to die well. Let us consider but a few:

- Die to the world. While we live in the world, we should not despise those good things which God has created for our enjoyment. When we die to the world, we use the gifts God has given us and the riches we acquire for the good of others. Abraham was favored by God and possessed great riches. His favor remained in good standing because beyond his own moderate use of the gifts of this world, he was most willing to use them for the good of others as the Almighty willed. (Preface)
- Carefully guard the gates of your senses to avoid a multitude of sins (Precept XVI):
  - Guard the eyes lest this gate lead us to lust or envy. St. Augustine explains that it is not in the glance, but in the dwelling upon a person or object that we find danger. You can surely admire the beauty of God's creation and the beauty of other humans. But if the thought is not motivated by the good of the other, than it is time to avert your gaze.
  - Guard the tongue. With the tongue, man sins against God by blasphemy or perjury; against his neighbor by detraction and back-biting; and against himself, by boasting of good works which he has not done in reality; and by asserting that he did not do the evil things which he did... The remedy against evil words, and ...deeds also, and thoughts, and desires, is to think beforehand on what you are about to do, or speak, or desire. Do not do anything rashly.

Consider what is to be done; and if it agrees with sound reason, do it; but if not, do not do it. Summarizing the main points of his work, practicing virtue, and practicing the faith in relation to the sacraments will empower a person to live well and to die well.

When Jesus finished teaching, people were astonished because of the wisdom and authority with which he spoke. Robert Bellarmine learned from the Master and was well respected as a preacher and a

teacher. Let us guard our tongues wisely that we too may learn from the Master and speak with wisdom and authority.

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<sup>i</sup> Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1839

<sup>ii</sup> [franciscanmedia.org/saint-robert-bellarmino/](http://franciscanmedia.org/saint-robert-bellarmino/)

<sup>iii</sup> [catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-robert-bellarmino-366](http://catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-robert-bellarmino-366)

<sup>iv</sup> [catholicnewsagency.com/martyrology\\_entry.php?n=4827](http://catholicnewsagency.com/martyrology_entry.php?n=4827)

<sup>v</sup> Bellarmine, Robert. *The Art of Dying Well*. (Found at [saintsbooks.net/books](http://saintsbooks.net/books)).