

Readings: *Romans 12: 3 – 13; Psalm 88 (89): 1 – 4, 21, 22, 25, 27; John 10: 11 – 16.*

Charles Borromeo was born in 1538, the second son of a noble family in Northern Italy. He received the clerical tonsure at the age of twelve and went on to study in Milan and Pavia. By the time he was twenty both his parents had died, and his mother's brother had become Pope Paul IV. Not yet twenty-two, still in minor orders he was made a cardinal, appointed to administer the see of Milan, and given important responsibilities in Rome. He had to find deputies to care for Milan. In 1562 the Council of Trent was re-opened after a gap of ten years. Charles played a great part in its work, notably in the drafting of the catechism and in the reform of the liturgy and its music. Meanwhile his elder brother had died, and Charles had become head of the family: But, instead of marrying, he resigned his position to his uncle and gave himself to his ministry. He was ordained priest in 1562 and two months later consecrated as archbishop of Milan, but still kept in Rome. Eventually in 1566, after the death of his uncle the Pope, he was allowed to move to Milan. The archdiocese had long been without a resident bishop and was in a very poor state. Laypeople no longer went to mass or made use of the sacraments. The clergy were ignorant and idle, and some lived immoral lives. For the next eighteen years he worked tirelessly to redress these ills. He began by reforming his own household, giving away much of his personal income and living more simply than was the custom among prelates. He founded seminaries for the education of the clergy and set an example to them by the care he took over worship and preaching. He was also concerned for the education of children, requiring parish priests to hold catechism classes on Sundays and Holydays and appointed about three thousand catechists to help in this work. Two events demonstrate his pastoral concern for his people. In 1570, when the harvest failed and there was famine in the city, he worked hard to find supplies of food, and fed 3,000 people for three months. In 1576 there was an outbreak of plague lasting two years, and, in the absence of the governor, Charles took practical and pastoral charge feeding up to 70,000 people a day. His continued labours eventually undermined his health, and he died in the night of 3rd /4th November 1584, aged forty-six. He was buried in his cathedral, where his shrine remains, and was canonized in 1610.