

Some Facts About USC's Patron Saint . . .

St. Charles Borromeo

SAINT CHARLES BORROMEEO was born in an age when some people used to say "If you want to go to Hell, be a priest."

It might be difficult for the reader to understand the foregoing statement if he does not know a little of Church history that dates back particularly to the early part of the sixteenth century. Corruption and vice, practiced in and outside the Church by priests and non-priests, marked the general order of that era. The Church fought a grim battle against its wayward members as the call for reformation and counter-reformation rocked the social and political foundations of the time. It was not surprising, then to find the clergy, secular and regular, living an open life of scandal and spiritual squalor. "They walked the streets in lay dress, complete with sword and pistol. Churches were in a half-ruinous condition, the sacred vessels corroded with rust, the vestments moth-eaten" commented Rev. Francis Holland, O.S.C., in his biographical account of St. Charles. Intrigues from within threatened the very structure of the Church. As a consequence thereof, the faith of the populace wavered. It was indeed a time that called for a man of God to rekindle the flame of faith and once more show his flock the "way to salvation."

Four men answered the call. One of them was Saint Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan and Cardinal.

*The three other men: Pope St. Pius V; St. Philip Neri and St. Ignatius Loyola.

by TOMAS ECHIVARRE

Thus, Very Rev. Father Albert van Gansewinkel, former USC Rector, wrote in an editorial:

"As you enter the lobby of the Collegiate Building of the University, your eyes are drawn to a life-size statue in bronze. A man in a bishop's garb, with a powerful gesture, and energetic features. Saint Charles Borromeo, the Patron Saint of the University since 1779. The statue, a gift of the USC Alumni Association, was ordered and made in Milan, Italy, where St. Charles was Archbishop and Cardinal in the sixteenth century. That century was one of the most critical, stormy, and important periods in the entire history of the Church; and St. Charles, a Cardinal at the age of 22, Secretary of State under Pope Paul IV and at the age of 40, was one of the most outstanding, clear-sighted, powerful leaders." (From the *Carolinian*, December edition, 1952).

St. Charles was born in the Castle of Arona on Lake Maggiore on October 2, 1538. He was the second of two sons in a family of six. At the age of twelve, after he received his clerical tonsure, St. Charles became the assignee of the Abbey of Arona with a revenue of thirteen thousand pounds a year. The rich Benedictine Abbey was assigned to him by his uncle, Julius Caesar Borromeo. St. Charles' parents, Count Gilbert Borromeo and Margaret (whose younger brother was Pope Pius IV), were

surprised upon learning that the boy insisted on spending the money for the poor.

As a student, St. Charles was not brilliant and he suffered an impediment in his speech. However, a friend of his said: "I have often wondered how it was that, without any natural eloquence or anything attractive in his manner, he was able to work such changes in the hearts of his hearers. He spoke but little, gravely, and in a voice rarely audible—but his words always had effect." The young Charles learned his Latin at Milan and afterwards went to the University of Pavia where his prudence and self-discipline made him a model to the youth in that University, who according to some authorities, "had an evil reputation for vice." At the age of twenty-one, he became a Doctor of Civil and Canon Law. In 1550, he was nominated by the new Pope, Cardinal de Medici (his uncle) administrator of the vacant See of Milan. (Actually he took possession of the See in 1565. Before him, no other Archbishop had lived and resided in Milan for 80 years).

In quick succession, Charles was named legate to Bologna, Romagna, and the March of Ancona, and protector of Portugal, the Low Countries, the Catholic cantons of Switzerland, and the orders of St. Francis, the Carmelites, the Knights of Malta and many others. St. Charles



ST. CHARLES BORROMEEO

received all these honors at the young age of twenty-three.

But despite all this, he was openly opposed to ostentation and luxury. When someone offered to have St. Charles' bed warmed, he was heard to have said, "The best way not to find a bed cold, is to go colder than the bed is."

At the age of 27, he assumed the duties of his Pastoral Office.

His diocese was one of the largest in Italy and contained 2,200 churches and some 600,000 souls to care for. With mind and heart, St. Charles worked to restore the faith of the people towards the priesthood and eventually succeeded in putting the vocation in its proper place in the hearts of the faithful.

Because of his intense devotion to whip the errant clergy into line, he had to incur the ire of some suf-

fragans and priests who did not like his reforms. (One reform enforced by him: all his clergy should be clean-shaven). Thus his life was in danger when a religious order called Humiliati tried to prevail upon the Pope to annul St. Charles' regulations. One of the Humiliati themselves, a priest called Jerome Donati Farina, agreed to carry out the plot to assassinate St. Charles after the Pope supported the latter's reforms and frustrated the Humiliati's desire to have the same annulled. Three priors hatched out the evil scheme to liquidate St. Charles, agreed to do the deed. (The sum and for forty gold pieces, Farina was raised by selling ornaments from a church).

Posting himself at the door of the Chapel in the young archbishop's house, Farina, on October 26, 1569, while St. Charles was saying his evening prayers with the rest of his household, shot him at the moment when the following words were sung: "It is time therefore that I return to Him that sent me." Charles fell, but he was only grazed by Farina's bullet.

As a patron of learning, St. Charles was without peer. In the succeeding years, he established six (6) seminaries accommodating more than 700 students. He also founded the Jesuit College at Bresa (1573) and the Swiss College in Milan (1579). He was the originator of the "Sunday-Schools," two hundred years before Robert Raikes distinguished himself in England for his great dedication and work among Protestant Children.

At an age when most men reach the prime of their life and the peak of their careers, St. Charles gave up his life. He died at the age of 46. His last words at the hour of his passing were "Ecce Venio", "Behold I Come".

The life and times of Saint Charles Borromeo should be a continuing inspiration not only for the youth but also for the clergy.

May each Carolinian be proud of the fact that his forefathers have chosen St. Charles for the patron of the University. May he be proud that they had chosen well. #