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Memorial of St Robert Bellarmine, bishop and doctor of the Church

Date: Wednesday, September 17, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: 1 Timothy 3:14–16
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 111:1–6 | **Response:** Psalm 111:2
Gospel Acclamation: John 6:63c, 68c
Gospel Reading: Luke 7:31–35
Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

The readings today ask a probing question: Are we truly listening to the voice of Christ, and is that Word shaping the way we live?

Today, in the Jesuit calendar, we celebrate Saint Robert Bellarmine, a man who embodied the very wisdom Jesus speaks of in Luke's Gospel. While the universal Church also commemorates Saint Hildegard of Bingen on this day, the Jesuit calendar gives this feast to Bellarmine—Jesuit, scholar, bishop, and saint—a witness of faithful listening, thoughtful speech, and steady courage in the service of truth. Jesuits will commemorate Hildegard tomorrow, 18 September, honouring her extraordinary gifts in the Spirit with no less reverence.

In the first reading, Saint Paul summarises the mystery of our religion. It is not an idea or a system of thought—it is Christ Himself: "He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, and received up in glory" (1 Tim 3:16). This is the foundation of our faith: not a set of ideas, but the living person of Jesus. Bellarmine gave his life to defending this mystery—at universities, in councils, and through writings that reached far beyond Rome. His life itself became a proclamation among the nations.

"Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them" (Ps 111:2). This was Bellarmine's vocation—not only to teach, but to study the works of the Lord with humility and delight. He wrote catechisms for children, theological treatises for scholars, and pastoral letters for the faithful. For us in Zimbabwe, where many feel the weight of hardship, this verse becomes a spiritual invitation. Can we still study God's works with wonder—in shared meals, honest work, quiet perseverance, and the hope that does not give up?

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In the Gospel, Jesus speaks to a generation that will not respond. “To what shall I compare the people of this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplace,” always complaining, never satisfied. John the Baptist came fasting—they said he was possessed. Jesus came feasting—they called him a glutton. But Jesus concludes: “Wisdom is justified by all her children” (Luke 7:35). That is, true wisdom is not proved in theory but in fruit.

Robert Bellarmine’s life was full of such fruit. As a Jesuit formed by the Spiritual Exercises, he prayed the Examen daily, asking: Where have I listened? Where have I resisted? His was, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, a life of “prayer that listens to the word of God” (General Audience, 23 Feb 2011)—a listening that became the soul of all his activity. As a teacher, he helped ordinary people grasp the mystery of Christ. As a theologian, he exercised prudence—that cardinal virtue which, as he taught, begins with listening to reality (*Doctrina Christiana*, p. 65)—as he contributed to the Council of Trent and responded to the questions of his time.

His interaction with Galileo Galilei is a key example of this balance. Bellarmine respected Galileo’s intellect and scientific method, yet he urged that the heliocentric theory be presented as a hypothesis until the evidence could be fully demonstrated, thereby safeguarding both scientific integrity and the Church’s responsibility to interpret Scripture carefully. His was not a stance of fear, but of faithful discernment—open to truth, yet attentive to unity.

In a world filled with noise, rapid judgments, and division, Bellarmine offers us a model of thoughtful listening, courageous speech, and deep interiority. He trusted that wisdom, in time, would be justified by its children. That is our invitation too.

“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63). Bellarmine let those words shape him from within. In prayer. In study. In service. His wisdom was not self-made, but Spirit-born.

Just as the Church today is called to listen with the ear of the heart in the synodal journey, Bellarmine reminds us that authentic listening always leads to communion and truth. Jesus’ call to hear and obey invites us to examine the ways we, like Bellarmine, listen to God in our own contexts.

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So today, in the spirit of Saint Ignatius, place yourself in the Gospel scene. You are in the marketplace. There is noise all around—complaints, distractions, resistance. But Christ speaks above it all: “Wisdom is justified by all her children” (Luke 7:35). What would it mean for you to be a child of that wisdom today?

I leave you with three questions to carry into prayer today:

- Where am I hearing God’s voice but refusing to obey it, as the people in Luke 7 did? (Luke 7:31–35)
- How can I, like Bellarmine, “study the works of the Lord” (Ps 111:2) and let that study shape my daily choices?
- What fruit of “wisdom” is my life bearing this week, and how is the Holy Spirit urging me to grow? (John 6:63)

May the Holy Spirit, who makes Christ’s words spirit and life (John 6:63), awaken in us the same attentive ear that guided Saint Robert Bellarmine. Let us study the works of the Lord with delight, bear the fruit of true wisdom, and witness to the mystery of Christ revealed in us.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today’s readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.