



# The Art of Dying Well

*St. Robert Bellarmine*

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## **The Art of Dying Well** St. Robert Bellarmine

BEING now free from Public business and enabled to attend to myself, when in my usual retreat I consider, what is the reason why so very few endeavour to learn the "Art of dying Well," (which all men ought to know,) I can find no other cause than that mentioned by the Wise man: "The perverse are hard to be corrected, and the number of fools is infinite. (Ecclesiastes, i. 15) For what folly can be imagined greater than to neglect that Art, on which depend our highest and eternal interests; whilst on the other hand we learn with great labour, and practise with no less ardour, other almost innumerable arts, in order either to preserve or to increase perishable things? Now every one will admit, that the "Art of dying Well" is the most important of all sciences; at least every one who seriously reflects, how after death we shall have to give an account to God of everything we did, spoke, or thought of, during our whole life, even of every idle word; and that the devil being our accuser, our conscience a witness, and God the Judge, a sentence of happiness or misery everlasting awaits us. We daily see, how when judgment is expected to be given, even on affairs of the slightest consequence, the interested party enjoy no rest, but consult at one time the lawyers, at another the solicitors, now the judges, and then their friends or relations. But in death when a "Cause" is pending before the Supreme Judge, connected with life or death eternal, often is the sinner compelled, when unprepared, oppressed by disease, and scarcely possessed of reason, to give an account of those things on which when in health, he had perhaps never once reflected. This is the reason why miserable mortals rush in crowds to hell; and as St. Peter saith, "If the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" 1st of St. Peter, iv. 1 I have therefore considered it would be useful to exhort myself, in the first place, and then my Brethren, highly to esteem the "Art of dying Well." And if there be any who, as yet, have not acquired this Art from other learned teachers, I trust they will not despise, at least those Precepts which I have endeavoured to collect, from Holy Writ and the Ancient Fathers.

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