

the others throw him out or speak against him. He told them to be patient and eventually the man became a Dominican priest. On the other hand, when he met a condemned man who refused to listen to any pleas for repentance, Philip did not try gentle words, but grabbed the man by the collar and threw him to the ground. The moved shocked the criminal into repentance and he made a full confession.

Humility was the most important virtue he tried to teach others and to learn himself. Some of his lessons in humility seem cruel, but they were tinged with humor like practical jokes and were related with gratitude by the people they helped. His lessons always seem to be tailored directly to what the person needed. One member who was later to become a cardinal was too serious and so Philip had him sing the Misere at a wedding breakfast. When one priest gave a beautiful sermon, Philip ordered him to give the same sermon six times in a row so people would think he only had one sermon.

Philip preferred spiritual mortification to physical mortification. When one man asked Philip if he could wear a hair shirt, Philip gave him permission-- if he wore the hair shirt outside his clothes! The man obeyed and found humility in the jokes and name-calling he received.

There were unexpected benefits to his lessons in humility. Another member, Baronius, wanted to speak at the meetings about hellfire and eternal punishment. Philip commanded him instead to speak of church history. For twenty-seven years Baronius spoke to the oratory about church history. At the end of that time he published his talks as a widely respected and universally praised books on ecclesiastical history!

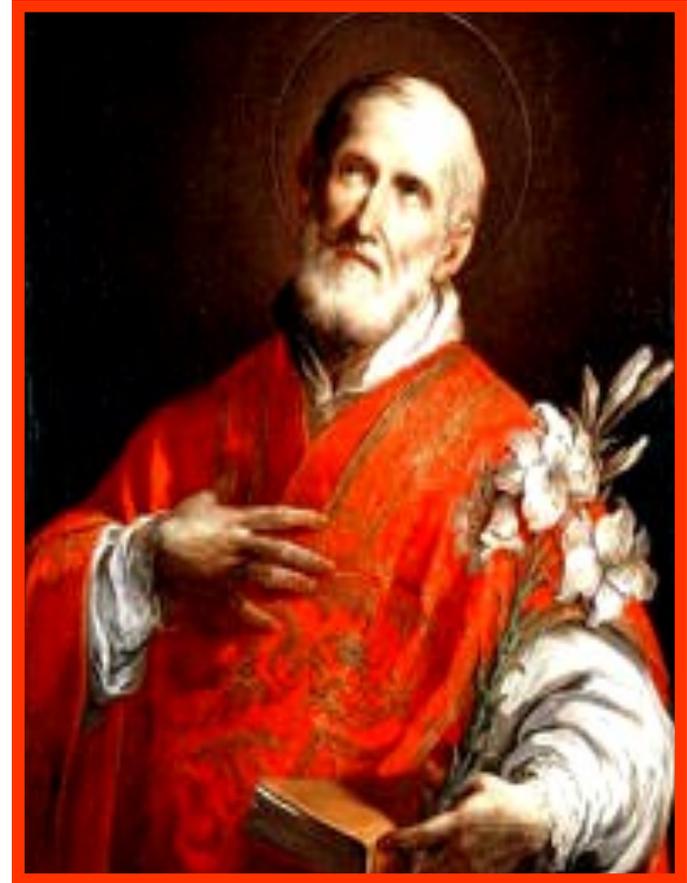
Philip did not escape this spiritual mortification himself. As with others, his own humbling humor. There are stories of him wearing ridiculous clothes or walking around with half his beard shaved off. The greater his reputation for holiness the sillier he wanted to seem. When some people came from Poland to see the great saint, they found him listening to another priest reading to him from joke books.

Philip was very serious about prayer, spending hours in prayer. He was so easily carried away that he refused to preach in public and could not celebrate Mass with others around him. When asked how to pray his answer was, "Be humble and obedient and the Holy Spirit will teach you." Philip died in 1595 on the Feast of Corpus Christi at the age of 80. He bears the noble titles of *Patron of Works of Youth* and *Apostle of Rome*. He was canonized on March 12, 1622 by Pope Gregory XV.

*(excerpted from: www.catholic.org; www.catholicculture.org; www.magnificat.ca; catholichoicfire.blogspot.com)

Saint Philip Neri

Feast Day: May 26



REFLECTION:

**Philip wished his spiritual children to serve God,
like the first Christians, in gladness of heart.
He said such was the true filial spirit,
expanding the soul, giving it liberty and perfection in action,
power over temptations, and aid towards its final perseverance.**

Saint Philip Neri

*Saint Philip Romolo Neri was born in Florence, Italy on July 22, 1515. He was one of four children of the notary Francesco Neri. His mother died when he was very young, but a very capable and competent stepmother filled her place. Although they were related to Italian nobility, the family was quite poor. Philip was a cheerful and friendly boy, and was popular with all who knew him.

At eighteen, Philip was sent to the town of San Germano, where he lived with a childless older cousin who was a successful businessman. During this time, Philip found a favorite place to pray up in the fissure of a mountain that had been turned into a chapel. We do not know anything specific about his conversion but during these hours of prayer, he decided to leave worldly success behind and dedicate his life to God.

After thanking his cousin, he went to Rome in 1533, where he was the live-in-tutor of the sons of a fellow Florentine. He studied philosophy and theology until he thought his studies were interfering with his prayer life. He then stopped his studies, threw away his books, and lived as a hermit.

Night was his special time of prayer. After dark he would go out in the streets, sometimes to churches, but most often into the catacombs of St. Sebastian to pray. During one of these times of prayer he felt a globe of light enter his mouth and sink into his heart. This experience gave him so much energy to serve God that he went out to work at the hospital of the incurables and started speaking to others about God, everyone from beggars to bankers.

In 1548, Philip formed a confraternity with other laymen to minister to pilgrims who came to Rome without food or shelter. The spiritual director of the confraternity convinced Philip that he could do even more work as a priest. After receiving instruction from this priest, Philip was ordained in 1551.

At his new home, the church of San Girolamo, he learned to love to hear confessions. Young men especially found in him the wisdom and direction they needed to grow spiritually. Among his penitents was Saint Ignatius. Philip began to realize that these young men needed something more than absolution; they needed guidance during their daily lives. So Philip began to ask the young men to come by in the early afternoon when they would discuss spiritual readings and then stay for prayer in the evening. The numbers of the men who attended these meetings grew rapidly.

In order to handle the growth, Philip and a fellow priest, Buonsignore Cacciaguerra gave a more formal structure to the meetings and built a room called the Oratory to hold them in. Philip understood that it was not enough to tell young people not to do something-- you had to give them something to do in its place. So at Carnival time, when the worst excesses were encouraged, Philip organized a pilgrimage to the Seven Churches with a picnic accompanied by instrumental music for the mid-day break. After walking twelve miles in one day everyone was too tired to be tempted.

In order to guide his followers, Philip made himself available to everyone at any hour-- even at night. He said some of the most devout people were those who had come to him at night. When others complained, Philip answered, "They can chop wood on my back so long as they do not sin." Not everyone was happy about this growing group and Philip and Buonsignore were attacked by the priests they lived with. Eventually Philip and his companions were vindicated and went on with their work.

In 1555, the Pope's Vicar accused Philip of "introducing novelties" and ordered him to stop the meetings of the Oratory. Philip was brokenhearted but obeyed immediately. The Pope only allowed him to start up the Oratory again after the sudden death of his accuser. Despite all the trouble this man had caused, Philip would not let anyone say anything against the man or even imply that his sudden death was a judgment from God.

One church, for Florentines in Rome, had practically forced him to bring the Oratory to their church. Once gossip and accusations began, they started to harass the very people they had begged to have nearby! At that point, Philip decided it would be best for the group to have their own church. They became officially known as the Congregation of the Oratory, made up of secular priests and clerics.

Philip was known to be spontaneous and unpredictable, charming and humorous. If one had to choose one saint who showed the humorous side of holiness that saint would be Philip Neri.

He seemed to sense the different ways to bring people to God. One man came to the Oratory just to make fun of it. Philip would not let