

**THE HEART OF ST. PHILIP NERI**  
**EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR**

by Simone Raponi



## PRESENTATION

What can be known about a man who lived and worked five hundred years ago, without leave anything in writing? For centuries there should have been no record of it, according to the course of history. natural history of this world. Yet, St. Philip Neri, even today, is all over the world known, loved and invoked by many as a special patron.

This happens to those who are *in the world but not of the world*, that is, to those who give themselves so much generosity to the Holy Spirit as to allow their very lives to become a living expression of the Kingdom of Heaven, a sure guide for those who wish to undertake a serious journey of faith.

Father Filippo's pastoral method had nothing "studied" about it, but thanks to his meetings daily life with people, so simple, genuine and deeply imbued with healthy humanity, Father Philip Neri was able to draw behind him a crowd of men whom he trained in the school of the gospel, making them authentic disciples of Jesus and transforming the face of the people with his pastoral action dramatic and tense of 16th century Rome, to the point of deserving the title of *second apostle of Rome*.

This little volume allows us to go to his daily school in some way, as distills a phrase of authentic spiritual direction for every day of the year.

It was his spiritual children who testified at the *Processes* for his canonization, who remembered still with emotion, giving the opportunity to attest to them in writing, many of those words and recommendations they received from their spiritual father throughout their lives, feeling thus lovingly and competently guided on the path to Heaven. It is only thanks to them that it was possible to collect his spiritual legacy. Short sentences, sometimes very short, but a concentration of pure wisdom, which offers considerable food for thought and arouses an ardent desire for to conform to it. It will be easily noted that the Philipian method does not consist of ascetic practices particularly complicated, but in a deep knowledge of the human heart and soul, from which He wanted to eradicate the root of all sin: pride. Hence the insistence on the mortification of "pride." *rational* rather than corporal; the importance of obedience and blind trust that he demanded by his disciples so that they would put aside self-love and excessive esteem for their own feelings. All this in such an original way that even jokes and pranks found their place, even making the path of mortification ironic and pleasant.

Knowing Saint Philip Neri and placing yourself under his spiritual guidance is, even today, an experience unique within the spiritual heritage of the Church: it is the opportunity to embark on a journey deep within the heart of man and to open up to the knowledge of God's love.

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## INTRODUCTION

*«Saint Philip's aim was to train his disciples rather than impose laws on them, so that they themselves become living laws, so that, with the words of the Holy Scriptures, the laws would be written in their hearts.»*

ST. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, *Address to the Chapter*, February 9, 1848

"Let it not be said: the Saints do great things; but God does great things in his Saints", St. Philip Neri. He understood well that one becomes holy the more the stature of the Lord grows in the heart of man. It is in the modeling of the heart in the image of Christ – and not in particular heroisms – that the secret of true holiness. Remove from us the heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh – to borrow the image of the Holy Scripture (cf. Ez 36, 26) –, constitutes the greatest work of God in our lives and the fullest realization of our aspirations.

The state of our heart, in fact, is the perfect measure of who we really are.

When in our common speech we use similar expressions: "I opened my heart", "I my heart is broken", "I give you my heart", etc., we consider the "heart" as the center of the our person. In this sense, the term does not merely indicate a vital organ, but its meaning expands towards the manifold richness of the symbol. Thus, a single word is sufficient to express "love", "affections", "soul", "feelings", "will", "emotions", etc.

Knowing the "heart" of a person means penetrating into his inner world, looking at him in the eyes and glimpse a *magic* that cannot be reduced to visible actions and gestures, reading between the lines of his life to discover the uniqueness of its mystery, listen to the said and unsaid parts of its words, savouring their silences. Only starting from this authentic and never trivializing gaze, will we be able to get closer truly to the soul of a man.

This is undoubtedly no easy feat, even in the most intimate relationships.

How, then, can we know the heart of someone who is distant from us in space and time? way to try to glimpse the unfathomable richness of a person, which we have never seen Have you met someone directly? If you look closely, it's an experience that isn't entirely foreign to us.

We all feel the "presence", for example, of those more or less distant relatives, of whom in the Our family's works, sayings, teachings, and memories are passed down. We look at them photographs, trying to capture their temperament. We let them tell us about their life, while We are enchanted by the original and fascinating anecdotes that dot it. We learn the typical expressions, which gradually become more and more familiar to us.

This dynamic – typical of oral culture – is enriched by the value of the person of which we commemorate. Even more so if it is a Saint, alive, praying and present as an intercessor. in the communion of life among all who belong to Jesus Christ.



In the case of Filippo Neri, who chose not to entrust his experiences to any written work biographical and spiritual, the dynamics described above are even more evident. We know the "heart" of Philip through his teachings, transmitted by the first disciples and, more generally, witnessed by those who were struck by his irresistibly magnetic personality.

Far from presenting itself as a systematic theory of spiritual life, the Saint's lesson, condensed in short and incisive sayings, it maintains a simple and direct freshness, imbued however with the highest wisdom and effective spiritual strength. Philip's maxims, free from artificial refinements literary, they constitute real precious gems, from which a vibrant light emanates, capable of guiding the steps and warming the hearts of the disciples.

In them the changing colours of sweetness and strength, of gentleness and parrhesia alternate , of reproach and forgiveness, of humility and trust, in a full balance that only souls enlightened ones can reach. Hence Philip's spiritual ability to be able to generate children for God, in a form of paternity, which unfolds more through example than through teaching, more through discernment than in the imposition of a stereotypical model of sanctity, more in the abandonment confident in God than in clumsy attempts at self-improvement.

Philip never tires of pointing out *the unum necessarium*, which is the silent truth of Reality. divine, who loves freely with paternal and maternal love, and infuses creatures with superabundance of her life. We are committed to allowing her to fill the voids created by our stories of hardship and silent pain. It is up to us, then, to welcome it, allowing it to broaden its horizons. spaces – often narrow and twilight-like – of our hearts.

Philip had understood it well, because he had experienced it physically and spiritually. Absorbed in prayer in the catacombs of San Sebastiano in 1544, was so *violently* pervaded by the Spirit Saint to carry in his body the burning stigmata of the dilation of the heart, of the detachment of two ribs, as well as a strong palpitation that will accompany him for the rest of his life. It was this his personal Pentecost, which mystically burned his heart without consuming it and which oriented him radically towards his only North Star: «Whoever wants anything other than Christ, – he repeated – does not know that who wants; whoever asks for anything other than Christ, does not know what he asks for; whoever works, and not for Christ, he doesn't know what he's doing."

The extraordinary touch of the Spirit infused in Philip the communication of the very life of God, with all the abysmal love and incorruptible fecundity that belong to him.

The living water of the Spirit of God irrigated Philip's interiority to such an extent that in all his existence, in what he did and in what he said, the excess of that fire manifested itself *sine modo* divine, which burns eternally in the hearth of the Trinity. With St. Paul, Philip could also repeat: "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. This I live my life in the flesh by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (*Gal 2, 20*).



Only starting from this central statement, we can place the well in the right perspective known joy of the Saint, the drunken madness that cracks the gilding of appearances, the ecstasies, the clairvoyance, charity expressed in creative and singular forms, as well as tireless insistence on the exercise of Christian virtues and the necessity of the sacraments.

The darting sparks of Philip's *cor flammigerum* still shine today in his maxims, which are they present incandescent fragments of a multifaceted inspired wisdom, to be enjoyed in a a climate of assiduous meditation, to then put its suggestions to good use. The distribution of such sayings for every day of the year will help each of us to distill them in our own *palate cordis*, thus inviting us to rediscover the sublimity and to nourish the life of the inner man, because "even if our man "The outer part is perishing, but the inner part is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16).

Simone Raponi



### **Chronology of the Life of Saint Philip Neri**

#### **1515**

On July 21, 1515, Filippo Neri was born in Florence to Francesco and Lucrezia da Mosciano. his father, originally from Castelfranco di Sopra, worked as a notary.

Philip was the second-born of four children: Catherine, Elizabeth and Anthony, who died prematurely shortly after birth.

In 1520-1521 the family lost their mother Lucrezia, and Francesco Neri remarried with Alessandra by Michele Lensi, who knew how to tenderly love "Pippo buono".

#### **1531-1532**

Having completed his initial training with the Dominicans of the convent of San Marco, Filippo left his native Florence – politically shaken by the expulsion of the Medici and the advent of the republic, guided according to the spirit of Girolamo Savonarola – to head towards San Germano (Cassino), where a relative would have offered him good opportunities in the mercantile field.

#### **1533-1534**

After realizing that the mercantile activity was not for him, Philip decides to go to Rome, where he worked as a tutor at the house of the papal customs officer Galeotto Caccia. compensation included lodging and a frugal meal.

#### **1535-1537**

Filippo studied philosophy and theology at the Augustinians and at Sapienza University, but already in 1537 he abandoned studies, irresistibly attracted by a life of asceticism and prayer.

He dedicated himself to caring for the sick in the hospital of San Giacomo degli Incurabili and met the first Jesuits who arrived in Rome, including St. Ignatius of Loyola, Diego Lainez and Alfonso Salmeron, of whom listens with interest to the sermon in the church of Santa Maria della Strada.



**1544**

It was the year of a profound mystical experience, which tradition places in the catacombs of San Sebastian, on the eve of Pentecost. During an intense prayer, in which Philip asked for «having spirit», the Holy Spirit penetrated him *“physically”*, causing him a real dilation of the heart, as later confirmed by the autopsy. This was the extraordinary effusion that introduced him to the sphere of mystical experience for the rest of his life.

**1548**

Together with his confessor, Father Persiano Rosa, Filippo founded the Confraternity of the SS. Trinity, primarily dedicated to the Eucharistic cult, to the reception of pilgrims (especially during the Holy Year of 1550), as well as to assist the poor discharged from hospitals.

**1551**

Encouraged by the spiritual advice of Father Rosa, Philip receives minor orders and the subdiaconate in the church of San Tommaso in Parione; the diaconate in San Giovanni in Laterano; and on May 23 he was ordained a priest in San Tommaso in Parione by the vicegerent Sebastiano Lunel.

He resides at San Girolamo della Carità and welcomes his friends in his room for the treatment familiar with the Word of God. These meetings will form the nucleus from which the the Oratory. Additional charitable activities are also added, as well as the Visit to the Seven Churches, an ancient penitential pilgrimage, revived by Philip in a devotional-recreational sense.

**1556-1557**

Philip reads the *Notices from the Indies of Portugal* and wonders if his vocation is not that of to become a missionary among peoples not yet reached by the proclamation of the Gospel. Regarding this thought, he asks for advice from the Cistercian Agostino Ghattini, monk at Tre Fontane, who will dispel his doubts any doubt: "Your Indies will be Rome." This event marks the beginning of Philip's activity of a fundamental consolidation.



**1559**

Philip, already suspected of surrounding himself with unsavory people, is questioned by the cardinal vicar Virgilio Rosario, who will die on May 22. Pius IV, understood the right intentions of Philip and the goodness of his work, he will send the Father two Candlemas candles as a sign of reconciliation.

**1564**

Philip, at the request of his fellow countrymen, takes on the parish leadership of the church of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, where, together with his first disciples ordained priests (Cesare Baronio, Alessandro Fedeli, Giovan Francesco Bordini), begins a first form of community life.

**1575**

Gregory XIII officially erected, with the Bull *Copiosus in misericordia* of 15 July, the Congregation of the Oratory, to which he entrusted the little church of Santa Maria in Vallicella. Philip and the they immediately decide to rebuild the newly formed Congregation.

The first stone was blessed on September 27 by Alessandro de' Medici (later Pope Leo XI).

**1577**

Alessandro de' Medici celebrated his first mass at Vallicella on February 3. After the first meeting of the Congregation, which took place on March 15, in the month of May Philip was elected provost.

**1578**

The Pope visits the church of Santa Maria in Vallicella and one of the Fathers, Francesco Maria Tarugi, draws up a reminder of the state of the Congregation, as well as a list of members.

**1583**

On March 16, the famous miracle at Massimo's house occurred. Filippo "resurrected" young Paolo, the son of Filippo. of Prince Fabrizio.

On November 22, at the Pope's request, Philip leaves his "nest" in San Girolamo to move at Vallicella together with the fathers of the new Institute.





**1584**

Philip is unanimously elected provost for life.

**1592**

Cardinal Aldobrandini, a disciple of Philip, ascends to the throne of Peter with the name of Clement VIII. The mutual affection and esteem remained unchanged, even during the pontificate. It will be for the work of Philip, through the influence of Baronius, that the Pontiff will decide the reconciliation with Henry IV of France.

Clement VIII esteems the members of Philip's community and decides to elect Giovan Francesco Bordini bishop of Cavaillon and Francesco Maria Tarugi archbishop of Avignon.

**1594**

The Pope insists on wanting to create Philip cardinal, but – as the testimonies tell – «the Father he took off his cap, looked up to the sky, and said: "Paradise, paradise."»

**1595**

After a series of falls and recoveries, Filippo's health seems to be definitively compromised. Nevertheless, almost miraculously, he manages to celebrate the mass on May 23rd. and the following day, the solemnity of *Corpus Christi*.

He passed away innocently during the night between 25th and 26th May, after having blessed his Congregation.

With extraordinary promptness, on August 2nd, the canonization process opened.

**1615**

On May 25, Paul V inscribed Philip in the list of the Blessed.

**1622**

Gregory XV canonizes Saint Philip on March 12, together with Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, Teresa of Avila, and Isidore of Seville. The Romans ironically said that on that day the Pope he had canonized "four Spaniards and a Saint".

