

From the Pastor

May 29, 2022

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

ST. PHILIP NERI: On Thursday May 26th the Church kept the liturgical commemoration of St. Philip Neri. Interestingly, it will be kept merely a few days before Memorial Day when we pray for the members of the armed forces, our soldiers. St. Philip who died on May 26, 1595, was indeed a soldier also. He was a soldier in the never ending battle against the world, the flesh and the devil. And his weapon in this war was penance.

St. Philip died on a Wednesday evening in Rome, the Vigil of Corpus Christi. Had he lived until Saturday of that week he would have attained the great age of 80. And all but the first eighteen years of that long life were spent in the City of Rome. Although a Florentine by birth, he is called the Apostle of Rome, the City he had vowed never to leave.

It is said of the Emperor Augustus that he found Rome made of brick and left it marble. The same could be said of St. Philip in the spiritual sense. For he found a decadent Rome far from God and converted it into a paradise. He did so not with brick and mortar but with kindness and humility. He was called in his own life time *Pippo Buono*, Phil the Good.

Philip arrived in Rome at the age of 18 and was ordained a priest in the Church of St. Bartholomew at the age of 36, eighteen years after his arrival in the City. On the eve of his first Pentecost in Rome he prayed at the catacombs of St. Sebastian for the entire night. During the night a visible flame descended and entered into his body. Throughout his whole life that flame burned within him – the flame of charity. To be in his presence was to feel a warmth and goodness.

When the Prince Paolo Massimo died at the age of 12 on March 16, 1588, Philip raised him from the dead by simply touching the child. To this day, the Massimo family opens their home every March 16th and invites the poor to dine with them. Any priest may enter the chapel and say Mass there. While I was a student in Rome many years ago I offered Mass in the chapel and the prince himself served as the acolyte. (It is a long story for another time, but during the Mass parts of the ancient ceiling began to fall around the altar!) I tried to finish the Mass very quickly that day, celebrating Mass in Latin and preaching in Italian. Interestingly, Father Elias and his parents were present at that Mass.

Philip was three times asked to accept the dignity of being a bishop, and three times refused in humility. He eschewed all civil and Church honors. When one of his early followers Cesario Baronio received his doctorate in canon law (the J.C.D.) Philip made him tear up the diploma and with it line the bed of the many cats who came to the Church of San Giralomo della Carità. Thus did he teach Baronio of the vanity of worldly learning and the enduring treasure of humility. When offered any honors, Philip simply responded *Preferisco il Paradiso!* (I prefer Heaven).

Philip founded the Oratory, a religious congregation in the Church. The great Cardinal Newman was an Oratorian and there is an Oratory at the Church of St. Boniface in Brooklyn. Philip used

music to evangelize the young people of Rome and the musical form that he founded is called the oratorio.

Philip's devotion while celebrating Holy Mass was so great that he would often go into a trance and be unable to continue for several hours. The little altar server would extinguish the candles and go for something to eat and then return to the Mass. Soon Philip began to levitate during Mass and the Pope forbade him to offer Mass in public. The pope prudently, if not understatedly, said that it would be distracting to the faithful at Mass.

Philip never trusted himself and each day prayed to God: *Beware, O Lord, for today Philip will betray you unless you help him!*

St. Philip's picture and relic are in our Rectory Chapel. May St. Philip ever guide and protect us. From heaven he asks the question he always did on earth: *When shall we have a mind to begin to do good?*

MEMORIAL DAY TOLLING OF THE BELLS: The bells of our beautiful Church will toll on Memorial Day both at 12 noon and 6P.M. in blessed and eternal memory of those who have given their lives for our country.

AWARDS DINNER AND GOLF OUTING

Please see the bulletin for information about our Annual Awards Dinner and Golf Outing to be held on June 2nd. This is the major fundraiser for our parish and therefore I humbly ask your generous participation in this endeavor. Last year we broke all records in netting over \$101,000 for St. Paul's. This year our fervent and fond hope is to exceed this record. Because this is so important, I will be speaking at all the Masses on May 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th to explain our great need for your support.

In Jesus and Mary,
Monsignor James F. Pereda