

From the Pastor
May 30, 2021
Holy Trinity Sunday

ST. PHILIP NERI: On May 26th, the Church keeps the liturgical commemoration of St. Philip Neri. Interestingly, it will be kept on the Friday 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 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.

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 Daily Mass 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: Today we observe Memorial Day when we pray for and thank God for the service of those in the armed forces of our nation. The day began as a day when the graves of our fallen soldiers would be adorned with spring flowers. Thus the original name of the holiday, Decoration Day. (My good father always called the holiday "Decoration Day" until the day of his death 24 years ago. But he also called any sound system the "Victrola.") May God bless my fellow veterans and all who have served in the armed forces of our nation.

ST. RITA: May 22nd is the Feast of Saint Rita of Cascia, the saint of the Impossible. She has worked innumerable miracles for her clients I would encourage all of you to pray to her unceasingly. Over twenty five years ago a wonderful gentleman whom I had befriended while I was living and studying in Rome and his son (Andrea and Carlo respectively) drove me the great distance from Rome to St. Rita's shrine in Cascia (I had no use of a car while I was a student in Rome). The father Andrea had been miraculously spared when he was in a terrible car accident at the age of 17. He attributed the saving of his life to St. Rita and every year went to her shrine on her feast. How well I remember being with them that day many years ago. I even remember stopping for *pranzo* with them and eating delicious trout that had just been caught and had been roasted in aluminum foil. Sadly I have lost contact with Andrea and presume God has called him home where he may be with St. Rita forever. Ever since that day, I have been a devoted client of St. Rita and my mother, although her baptismal name was Marie, was known as Rita. It is she who also instilled into me a love of St. Rita, the *Saint of the Impossible*.

In Jesus and Mary,
Monsignor James F. Pereda