

St. Philip Neri

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1515–1595 • Italy

Philip was a funny, cheerful boy, and his family nicknamed him “Good Little Phil.” His uncle ran a successful business in Florence, and, when Philip was a young man, he worked for his uncle. His family hoped that one day he would take over this family business. But God had other plans for Philip. One day at prayer, Philip had such a deep mystical encounter with God that his heart was filled with joy and love. He had to share his joyful love of God with others!

Philip moved to Rome. Rome is where the pope lives; it is the heart of the Church. But the people in Rome were taking their Faith for granted. Both the priests and the people had stopped trying to live holy lives. Philip wanted to rekindle the Church’s heart with the same fire of love that filled his own. He would wander the streets of Rome and start conversations with strangers. Everyone liked talking to him because of his good cheer. During conversations he always asked the same question: “Well, brothers, when shall we begin to do good?” And then he would take that person to a hospital to serve the sick, or inside a church to pray. He made it possible for people to start serving God right away.

One Pentecost Eve, a globe of fire appeared before Philip’s eyes. The blaze entered his mouth, and so great a love for God overwhelmed him that it was more than he could endure. He cried out to God, “Enough, enough, Lord, I can bear no more.” After he recovered, he felt his chest. There he found a swelling right over his heart, almost as if his heart had grown larger out of love for Jesus.

Soon after this experience, Philip became a priest and founded the congregation of Oratorians. He kept his cheerfulness and sense of humor even when hearing confessions. For a proud man’s penance, Philip made him carry Philip’s own fat old dog in his arms through the city streets. This was to teach the man humility. Philip also laughed at himself. He would wear his cloak inside out, or he would intentionally mispronounce Latin words to keep others from admiring him too much.

The people of Rome grew to love their cheerful priest. His joyful love for God renewed their love for God, too. Philip died a holy death at eighty years of age after a full day of hearing confessions. His congregation of Oratorians continue his work to this day with a joyful spirit. St. Philip Neri, enflame my heart with love for God!