

Saint Philip Neri — A Personal Connection

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Saint Philip Neri is very special to me because when Father Anthony Dill was ordained in 2012 at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, he asked me to go along and preach his first Mass.

The night before his ordination, he had an hour of adoration in one of the churches of Rome, which happened to be the church where St. Philip Neri said Mass and heard confessions. During the Holy Hour, I was assigned to the confessional — the very same confessional that St. Philip Neri heard confessions in. So I consider that certainly one of the highlights of that trip.

And as Father Dill says, that makes me actually a third-class relic because I touched what a saint touched.

So St. Philip Neri was truly incredible. He lived in the 16th century, during the time of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. He went to Rome with some theological training, but he was still a layman. He decided to form a group of men who would come together to pray, sing hymns, read from the Bible, and reflect on it. Eventually, after he was ordained a priest, this became the Congregation of the Oratory, which still exists today.

The Oratorians are a somewhat loose congregation in which priests and lay people come together for prayer, hymns, Bible study, and theological reflection.

Closest to us here in Lebanon would be oratories in Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., and two in New Jersey.

Along with prayer and study, St. Philip also went out into the streets of Rome. He and his companions performed pastoral work and corporal works of mercy. To this day, he is known as the "Apostle of Rome" and the "Reformer of the Eternal City."

One of the most famous things about St. Philip is that he was not a dour saint at all. He was joyful, cheerful, quick with a joke, and filled with love.

There is a famous story that while praying to the Holy Spirit for spiritual gifts, the Holy Spirit came to him in the form of a ball of fire that entered into his mouth and heart.

When he died and an autopsy was performed, it was discovered that his heart had enlarged to twice the size of a normal man's heart. Two of his ribs had actually broken and rehealed around the enlarged heart to make room for it.

So we have this remarkable physical manifestation of his spiritual life — a life known for love.

And it was a joyful kind of love, not the dour kind we sometimes associate with saints.

“The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.”

Today, through the intercession of St. Philip Neri, let us pray that our hearts too may be enlarged to accommodate all of the gifts and the love that God wishes to give us.

May the love of God be poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, and may we be known for our charity and our love as we direct our lives toward God and toward others for God's greater honor and glory.

St. Mary's Church — Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Lebanon, Pennsylvania