

Philip Neri



Feast Day: May 26

Canonized: March 12, 1615

Beatified: May 11, 1615

In the Mass on St. Philip Neri's feast day, we pray, "Lord, keep us always cheerful in our work for the glory of your name and the good of our neighbor" (Sacramentary, page 638). Philip was known for his cheerfulness and sense of humor. He used these gifts to serve God and to help others to grow in their faith.

Philip was born in Florence, Italy, in 1515. His family hoped that he would become a successful businessman like his uncle, but after spending time being trained by his uncle, he wanted to do other things. He went to Rome to study. He supported himself at the university by tutoring young students. He spent his free time praying in the churches of Rome and in the catacombs, the underground burial places of many of the saints. The early Christians often worshipped in the catacombs. While he was praying in one of the catacombs, Philip suddenly knew what God wanted him to do with his life.

Philip began to work among the poor and the sick of Rome. His work led him to the decision to become a priest. After ordination in 1551, Philip talked about his ministry whenever he met someone new and urged people to join him. He then founded the Oratory, a community of men who gathered together under Philip's leadership to pray, sing, and discuss their faith.

Some people call Philip the "saint maker" because so many men who later became saints came to Philip seeking advice and direction for living their faith. Some of these men were St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Francis de Sales, St. Charles Borromeo, and St. Francis Xavier. It is said that even popes and bishops came to the Oratory to seek Philip's advice.

Even though he was an important person of his day, Philip always kept his sense of humor. A legend about him says that when the pope wanted to make Philip a cardinal, he hung a cardinal's hat on Philip's door. People say that he took the hat and played catch with it, throwing it like a Frisbee. His message was, "Don't take yourself too seriously."

Philip died in 1595, when he was an old man, leaving the Church a lasting legacy. He was canonized in 1622. His life teaches us to be optimistic and hopeful that God has given us Good News in Jesus and that we are called to share that Good News with love and joy.