



St. Philip Neri,

the Second Apostle of Rome and the Reformer of the Eternal City

A Pastoral Letter to the People of God of the Diocese of Rockville Centre

Most Reverend John O. Barres, Bishop of Rockville Centre

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from the Most Reverend John O. Barres, Bishop of Rockville Centre
to the People of God of the Diocese of Rockville Centre

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Today we celebrate the Memorial of St. Philip Neri who lived from 1515 to 1595. St. Philip had a fascinating life and ecclesial mission. He is called the “Second Apostle of Rome” and the “Reformer of the Eternal City.”

He understood his own weakness in humility. He surrendered his life to the Holy Spirit and was a great servant and instrument of Church reform and evangelization in Rome.

In 1575, he founded the Congregation of Priests of the Oratory. Great Oratorians include the founder of the French School of Spirituality Cardinal Berulle (1575-1629) and St. John Henry Cardinal Newman¹ (1801-1890).

St. Philip Neri teaches us many things about holiness and mission:

1. St. Philip Neri teaches us devotion and surrender to the Holy Spirit.

In 1544, he had a profound experience of the Holy Spirit rushing into and expanding his heart physically in such a way that two of his ribs were broken and expanded outwards. His friend St. Ignatius of Loyola always saw a globe of Fire above St. Philip’s head whenever they were together. St. Philip Neri teaches us to allow the Holy Spirit to purify, lead and guide us on mission.

2. St. Philip Neri teaches us the importance of holy friendships.

When I am in Rome, I always visit the Church of San Gerolamo della Carita and pray in an Oratory with inscriptions which memorialize St. Philip Neri receiving his many saint friends such as St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), St. Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), St. Camillus de Lellis (1550-1614) and many others. They all supported, learned from and inspired each other. St. Ignatius said that the person who sent him the most Jesuit vocations was St. Philip.

3. St. Philip Neri teaches us the importance of conversation in Catholic Evangelization.

St. Philip often engaged total strangers in conversation outside of the Pantheon. He was joyful, sincere and charismatic. He had a charm that was supernatural and Spirit-driven. People instinctively trusted him. Step-by-step conversation with a wide variety of people and strangers was the way he cast the nets of Christ’s love onto the streets of Rome.



4. St. Philip Neri teaches us how a charitable sense of humor is an instrument for expressing the Church's unity.

St. Philip had a great sense of humor. He carried with him a Florentine joke book. He teaches us that charitable and life-giving humor can build unity among people and unity in the Church's mission. He also used humor pastorally to help people realize not to take themselves too seriously and to open themselves more deeply in humility to the power of the Holy Spirit.

5. St. Philip Neri teaches us to have a love for the early Christian martyrs and to be inspired by their heroic sacrifices.

St. Philip prayed at night in the Roman Catacombs where so many early Christian martyrs were buried and venerated. Praying in the catacombs put him in touch with their sacrifices and inspired St. Philip in the rhythm of his mental prayer and in the rhythm of his missionary sacrifice for Christ and the Church. His love for the early Christian martyrs also gave him a great love for the martyrs of his own time. Very close to where he lived at San Gerolamo della Carita, off the Piazza Farnese, was the English College. He had a joyful relationship with these English seminarians who were preparing to return to Elizabethan England for almost certain martyrdom. Upon their Ordination in Rome, these young English priests would go to St. Philip Neri for his blessing before returning to England. He would greet them by quoting the hymn traditionally sung on the Feast of the Holy Innocents: "Hail, flowers of the martyrs!" St. Philip's prayers in the Roman catacombs gave him a heightened appreciation of the role of martyrs of every age in the mission of the Church.

6. St. Philip Neri teaches us to love the Sacrament of Penance.

Like so many great priest saints in the Church's history such as St. John Vianney and St. Padre Pio, St. Philip could read people and he could read souls in confession. He was a pastoral artist and doctor with extraordinary mystical gifts. He teaches us that the way to our own "Road to Damascus Encounter" with the Risen Lord begins with the conversions that occur in confessionals.

7. St. Philip Neri teaches us to grow in our love and understanding of the Catholic Mass.

With his extraordinary mystical and charismatic gifts, St. Philip Neri understood the mystical and apostolic treasures, the invisible realities and miracles of the Mass. He is a great inspiration and model for our current Eucharistic Revival in the United States. He lived the Epiclesis Prayer in all the Eucharistic Prayers. He called down the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine and he called the Holy Spirit down on the Church and its mission of biblical and Eucharistic evangelization. If you feel like you are sometimes going through the motions at Mass, St. Philip Neri is an excellent intercessor to rekindle our love for Jesus Christ, who casts Fire on the earth through the Catholic Mass.

8. St. Philip Neri teaches us the unity of beauty and truth in his establishment of the Seven Churches Walk Pilgrimage in Rome.

Around 1553, St. Philip Neri established the tradition of visiting seven Roman churches to promote a joyful and common experience of interior life, liturgy, artistic and architectural beauty and a living sense of the communion of saints. Gathered around St. Philip, the group would meet before dawn and visit St. Peter's Basilica, St. Paul Outside-





the-Walls, St. Sebastian's, St. John Lateran, the Church of the Holy Cross-in-Jerusalem, St. Lawrence Outside-the-Walls and finally St. Mary Major. At each church, psalms, hymns and prayers would be prayed and St. Philip would give a brief sermon or meditation. These pilgrimages were a Catholic alternative to some of the spiritually destructive customs of the Roman Carnival.

As we look forward to celebrating Pentecost Sunday, Trinity Sunday, and Corpus Christi Sunday, we look to the example and intercession of St. Philip Neri and all the saints whose ecclesial missions were influenced by his spirit and the Holy Spirit.

Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us!
St. Philip Neri, Second Apostle of Rome and Reformer of the Eternal City, pray for us!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ John O. Barres

Most Reverend John O. Barres
Bishop of Rockville Centre

Endnotes:

1. See Bishop John Barres' Pastoral Letter, Heart Speaks to Heart, issued on the Occasion of the October 13, 2019 Canonization of St. John Henry Newman. We pray that St. John Henry Newman may one day be proclaimed a Doctor of the Church.

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Page 2: St. Philip Neri, Source: Filippo Neri, Il santo dell' allegria by Rita Delcroix. San Paulo. p198. Edizioni San Paolo s.r.l., 2011.

Page 3: St Philip's body in the Chiesa Nuova church, Rome, Italy. Photo from Bishop John Barres.

Page 4: St. Philip Neri, Source: Filippo Neri, Il santo dell' allegria by Rita Delcroix. San Paulo. p42. Edizioni San Paolo s.r.l., 2011.

