

May 26

ON SAINT PHILIP NERI

129.1 First Point

Saint Philip Neri had a great love for chastity. Once, when a shameless woman pretended to be sick and, having called him to her room and to her bed on the pretext of comforting her in some way, he resisted her very courageously; this led God to reward his great courage and his zeal for this virtue, and give him the grace not to feel the least stirring of the flesh.

One of the best ways to acquire and preserve chastity is to flee from the first assaults of the demon of impurity and to do great violence to yourself in order to gain victory on some occasion or notable temptation. This is also what has drawn down abundant graces and procured outstanding chastity for many saints.

Since this virtue is one of the most necessary and most important in your state, there are no means you should fail to use in order to preserve it. Those that will help you most are a horror of the world and a very great recollection. Apply yourself, then, to these virtues with all possible care.

129.2 Second Point

This saint gave himself so strongly to prayer that he sometimes spent forty hours uninterruptedly at it. His heart became so inflamed that he had to throw himself on the ground and bare his chest in order to cool the heat. As God usually gives much consolation to those who love this holy exercise, this saint sometimes felt so overcome by joy and consolation that he was constrained to cry out: Enough, Lord, enough! One day he experienced such a great assault of the love of God that his heart was all on fire; as a result, his ribs spread apart, and from that time onward they never returned to normal; this caused him to have heart palpitations for the rest of his days.

The duty you have of obtaining grace not only for yourselves but also for others and of learning how to touch hearts should make you apply yourselves very specially to prayer, for this is the exercise designed for you by God to procure his graces. Is this, then, what you have most at heart? Try to perform all your actions in a spirit of prayer, for this is one of the best ways to sanctify them.

129.3 Third Point

This saint had a very great devotion to the Passion of Jesus Christ and to the Most Blessed Virgin. He could not think or speak of the sufferings of Jesus without weeping, because he considered himself to be the cause. This made him sometimes say that the wound in Christ's side was very large, but if God did not restrain his hand, he would make it even larger. He also sometimes spent entire nights conversing with the Most Blessed Virgin.

These two loves, for Jesus Christ and for the Most Blessed Virgin, have, as a rule, been the principal devotions of the greatest saints. Saint Bernard and Saint Francis found their greatest pleasure meditating on the Passion of Jesus Christ, and they had such a very tender devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin that they chose her as the protectress and support of their orders.

Consider her in the same way as the protectress of your Institute, and, since the passion and death of Jesus Christ are the means of the sanctification of all the world, often ask God to apply the merits of Jesus generously both to yourself, and to the children entrusted to you.

Philip Neri (1515 - 1595) was born in Florence and from boyhood was noted for his combination of goodness and joy. He gave up a business career with an uncle in Naples after only a few months, and traveled on foot to Rome. At first he led a quiet life of prayer, study, and penance, during which he had a mystical experience alluded to by De La Salle. While praying to the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, he felt a ball of fire enter his heart; after his death it was discovered that two of his ribs over the heart were broken. Philip is best known for founding the Congregation of the Oratory, which grew out of his use of a room for prayer and for jovial entertainment of the young people of Rome. The musical term oratorio derives from this. Cardinal Newman became a member of the Oratory in Rome and founded two houses in England. Saint Philip wanted the members to be secular priests without any further vows, bound together by fraternal love, the apostolate of preaching and the administration of the sacraments. He said Mass and heard confessions on May 25, but became quite ill early the following morning, and died after blessing the community.