

Reflection Wednesday Week 8 St Philip Neri 2021

Saint Philip Neri (1515 - 1595) was born in Florence. At eighteen he went to Rome and earned his living as a tutor. He undertook much-needed charitable work among the young men of the city and started a brotherhood to help the sick poor and pilgrims. He was advised that he could do more good as a priest, and was ordained in 1551. He built an oratory over the church of San Girolamo, where he invented services, consisting of spiritual readings and hymns. He continued to serve the young men of Rome, rich and poor alike, with religious discussions and organising charitable enterprises. He showed particular care to the young students at the English College in Rome, studying for a missionary life and probable martyrdom in England. He formed the Congregation of the Oratory which flourishes in many countries today. He died in Rome in 1595. St Philip Neri was an enemy of solemnity and conventionality and always sought to combat pride, or melancholy, or hero-worship, and advocated laughter and cheerfulness.

In his letter to the Philippians (4), Paul could well have Philip Neri in mind when he writes, *“I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone. Fill your mind with everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honour, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise and the God of peace will be with you.”*

Philip recognised from the beginning that Jesus was praying for him at the Last Supper, *“I pray not only for these (his disciples), but for those also who through their words will believe in me.”* Jn 17. Philip was aware that Jesus’ presence, love and grace permeated everybody’s life and he responded wholeheartedly to that presence, a presence found equally in creation:

Lord, *in my body, I marvel at your design. Each organ does its job without instructions from me. Your wisdom surpasses anything that I can explain. I praise you as the God outside of creation who, through creation, makes yourself known to me and all people as we live within it. Father, I come across people who ignore your testimony or deny your existence, help me humbly point them to you as Creator. Let them see that you are the one who made the earth by your power, who established the world by your wisdom, and who stretched out the heavens by your understanding (Jer. 10:12). Your signature is plain. May what I know about you from creation invigorate my witness as well as my praise of you.*