



## May 26<sup>th</sup>: St Philip Neri (1515-95)

Philip Neri was born in Florence in 1515, one of four children of the notary Francesco Neri. The mother died while the children were very young, her place being filled by a capable stepmother. From infancy Philip had a docile, merry disposition. They called him "Pippo buono," "good little Phil," for he was a dutiful, attractive, cheerful boy, popular with all who knew him. At seventeen he was apprenticed in the business of a relative, but he had no aptitude for this, and at eighteen he left for Rome, without money or plan, trusting entirely to God's providence. He found work as a tutor, and studied philosophy and theology at the Sapienza (Rome's leading University) and at St. Augustine's monastery. Then, quite suddenly, moved by some inner prompting, he put an end to classes and studying, sold most of his books, and launched himself on a mission to the people of Rome.

He began in the most direct way possible, making acquaintances on street corners and in the public squares, where people were inclined to loiter. His warm friendliness and lively sense of humour would quickly catch the attention of passers-by, and once caught, they found it difficult to break away. By this warm, personal approach he gradually prevailed on many to give up their careless way of life. His customary question, "Well, brothers, when shall we begin to do good?" soon brought a response, provided he led the way.

He had a profound spiritual experience on the eve of Pentecost, 1544, when there appeared to him what seemed to be a globe of fire; it entered his mouth and afterwards he felt a swelling of the heart. Immediately he was filled with such paroxysms of divine love that he fell to the ground exclaiming, "Enough, enough, Lord, I can bear no more."



He founded a lay confraternity in 1548, and In 1575 he founded the *Congregation of the Oratory* - a group of priests dedicated to preaching, teaching and the sacraments. There are two famous oratories in England: the Brompton Oratory in London and the Birmingham Oratory, particularly associated with Newman.

Philip Neri is often remembered for his sense of humour and his room went by the nickname of the "Home of Christian mirth." His many jokes, usually at his own expense, are legendary. Perhaps the most quoted example is that he once shaved off half his beard before going to a ceremony being held in his honour.

