

Saint Philip Neri

1515-1595

Philip Neri was born in Florence, Italy, on July 21, 1515. In 1534, Philip went to Rome as a pilgrim, probably without any specific goal in mind. With the intention of becoming a penitent, he lived his young life with a joyful austerity. He dedicated his life to the cultivation of the spirit.

For his entire life, he cultivated this spirit of contemplation which was at times nourished by extraordinary phenomena similar to the experience of the Pentecost of 1544. While in the catacombs of Saint Sebastian and during a night of intense prayer, he was granted the physical gifts of the Holy Spirit. His heart was inflamed with a burning desire that remained with him for the rest of

Saint Philip Neri we find many examples of Angelic intervention. A poor musician, Sebastian by name, who was a penitent of Saint Philip, became gravely ill in Rome. The devil began to torment him with doubts about his salvation. Sebastian kept repeating: "I'm so unhappy; it would have been better had I not been born! I have lost all hope. I will be cast into the fires of hell. I'm already



his life. This intense gift of contemplation became part and parcel of the young Philip's entire life. It was manifested quietly and dramatically at the same time expressing itself in his ministry to the most needy and to the sick. He was ordained a priest in 1551. Almost immediately he was joined by other priests. Thus began, without any plan or preconceived organization, the *Congregation of the Oratory*, a new community of priests. This community of priests had in the Oratory not only a center for their spiritual life, but also a center for their fruitful apostolate. In 1575, Pope Gregory XIII consigned to Philip and his priests the small church of Santa Maria in Vallicella. It was there that he dedicated himself to the spiritual direction for many of the faithful. He died in the early hours of May 26, 1595, eighty years old, beloved and esteemed with great affection by his own community and all of Rome. In the life of

damned." His friends decided to call Saint Philip who immediately went to the musician's home. As soon as he entered, he imposed his hands on the sick man's head and began reciting the prayers of deliverance, assuring Sebastian not to be afraid. The devil fled and Sebastian declared that he saw a multitude of Angels and Archangels come to him and he then joyfully expired in the arms of Saint Philip. At another time, Saint Philip was saved by his own Guardian Angel who bodily lifted him up so as to avoid his being run over by a carriage with four horses out of control. The Saint mentioned that once a poor man approached him for some money. Without hesitating, Saint Philip took all the money from his wallet to give to him, but the mysterious person smiled and told him he just wanted to see what he would do and then he suddenly disappeared into the Heavens: it was an Angel sent by the Lord to test him.