

8th Wednesday of Ordinary Time I 2021
Memorial of St. Philip Neri

Sirach 36:1, 4-5a, 10-17

*Come to our aid, O God of the universe,
look upon us, show us the light of your
mercies,
and put all the nations in dread of you!
Thus they will know, as we know,
that there is no God but you, O Lord.
Give new signs and work new wonders.
Gather all the tribes of Jacob,
that they may inherit the land as of old,
Show mercy to the people called by your
name;
Israel, whom you named your firstborn.
Take pity on your holy city,
Jerusalem, your dwelling place.
Fill Zion with your majesty,
your temple with your glory.
Give evidence of your deeds of old;
fulfill the prophecies spoken in your
name,
Reward those who have hoped in you,
and let your prophets be proved true.
Hear the prayer of your servants,
for you are ever gracious to your people;
and lead us in the way of justice.
Thus it will be known to the very ends of the
earth that you are the eternal God.*

Mark 10:32-45

*The disciples were on the way, going up to
Jerusalem, and Jesus went ahead of them.
They were amazed, and those who followed
were afraid.*

*Taking the Twelve aside again, he began to
tell them what was going to happen to him.*

*“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and
the Son of Man
will be handed over to the chief priests and
the scribes, and they will condemn him to
death and hand him over to the Gentiles
who will mock him, spit upon him, scourge*

*him, and put him to death,
but after three days he will rise.”*

*Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee,
came to Jesus and said to him,
‘Teacher, we want you to do for us
whatever we ask of you.’”*

*He replied, ‘What do you wish me to do for
you?’”*

*They answered him, “Grant that in your
glory we may sit one at your right and the
other at your left.”*

*Jesus said to them, “You do not know what
you are asking. Can you drink the chalice
that I drink or be baptized with the baptism
with which I am baptized?”*

They said to him, ‘We can.’”

*Jesus said to them, “The chalice that I drink,
you will drink, and with the baptism with
which I am baptized, you will be baptized;
but to sit at my right or at my left is not
mine to give but is for those for whom it
has been prepared.”*

*When the ten heard this, they became
indignant at James and John.*

*Jesus summoned them and said to them,
“You know that those who are recognized
as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them,
and their great ones make their authority
over them felt.*

*But it shall not be so among you.
Rather, whoever wishes to be great among
you will be your servant; whoever wishes to
be first among you will be the slave of all.*

*For the Son of Man did not come to be
served but to serve and to give his life as
a ransom for many.”*



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*For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve
and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

“Not to be served, but to serve.” This certainly describes our St. Philip Neri, whose memorial we celebrate today. He gave himself completely, but not in a somber way: *“A cheerful and glad spirit attains to perfection much more readily than a melancholy spirit.”*

He was known for his jokes and pranks.

One day, while praying in the catacombs, Philip was thrown to the floor and a ball of fire “entered his mouth and lodged in his chest.” On his left side there appeared a swelling about the size of his fist. It is said that his heart became so inflamed with the love of God that it broke the ribs encasing it.

As Fenton writes, “it was partially on account of this that for the rest of his life he engaged in ludicrous pranks, read joke books, and played ‘the clown’ in general,” so as to deflect others admiration of him and to downplay his reputation for sanctity. He would walk around in large white shoes, dress in

bizarre costumes, wear his clothes inside out, and he once shaved only half of his otherwise full white beard.ⁱ

The half-shaved beard involves a wonderful story of how St. Philip was invited to a high-society gathering just so the host could display that he was an intimate of the holy man. St. Philip showed up as a silly holy man, much to the chagrin of his host.

A former pastor of mine, an Oratorian himself, imitated the Neri-look by shaving off half of his own full beard for our youths' All Saints Day costume party. He shall remain nameless until I can place it as a caption to that picture I have around somewhere. That good pastor emulated St. Philip in all other ways with his compassion, patience and sacrifice.

For a more biographical look at St. Philip Neri, I recommend visiting the website of the [St. Philip Neri Oratory in Toronto](#), a place I was blessed to visit for a week with that former, unnamed pastor.ⁱⁱ

St. Philip, as a role model for us, led his life in imitation of Christ. As we go about our life seeking God's will, we need not stray far if we follow what Jesus says and do as he does.

St. Paul describes Jesus at his transcendent:

For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col 1:16-17)ⁱⁱⁱ

And yet in our Gospel reading today, Jesus describes himself:

For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So many people search for God. And God does so love a searcher. Many look for a utopia, and spend their lives in attempting to build a paradise.

And yet Heaven is not far away.

Jesus paid the ransom—ultimately at the cross—but also every day of his ministry. He gave of himself—for us.

A mother knows that love as she sacrifices all for her children. She joins Mary at the foot of the cross in sorrow for her children's wounds. She joins Jesus in giving her very life to ensure their well-being.

A son knows that love as he attends to his aging father daily with sponge baths and story-telling, to ease his dad's transition from this life to the next.

They are not far from the Kingdom of Heaven.

We focus so much effort in making ourselves secure. We seek pleasure. Yet, you can remember from your own history those times of deepest sacrifice. You remember that which was the holiest and satisfying of your life. In that we experience being created through him, for him, who is before we are, and in whom we continue in being.

As, is the Son of Man, through the Son of Man, with the Son of Man, and in the Son of Man, we come not to be served, but to serve. We give our lives in sacrifice for others.

As St. Philip Neri, may we do so in a cheerful and glad spirit.

ⁱ <https://stm.yale.edu/blog/saint-philip-neri-a-fool-for-christ>

ⁱⁱ <https://oratory-toronto.org/heroes/saint-philip-neri/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/colossians/1>