



The Holy See

VISIT TO "CHIESA NUOVA"
DEDICATED TO SAINT MARY IN VALLICELLA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

26 May 1979

Beloved Brothers and Sisters!

I could not fail to visit this holy place, loved by the Romans, to venerate the one who was designated "The Apostle of Rome", St Philip Neri, the Joint Patron Saint of this noble City.

My coming was a duty, it was a need of the soul and it was also an anxious expectation! In this Church, where St Philip Neri's body rests, I address first of all my most cordial greeting to the priests, his confreres.

But then with special love I greet you the faithful, and in you I intend to reach all the faithful of Rome, the city of St Philip Neri, which he loved and benefited so much, and in which his living and sanctifying memory is still present.

You know that in the period in which he stayed in Rome, from 1534, when he arrived an unknown and poor pilgrim, to 1595, the year of his blessed death, St Philip Neri had a very deep love for Rome! He lived, worked, studied, suffered, prayed, loved, died, for Rome! He had Rome in his mind, his heart, his concerns, his plans, his institutions, his joys and also his sorrows! For Rome, St Philip was a man of culture and charity, of study and organization, of teaching and prayer. For Rome, he was a holy priest, a tireless confessor, a brilliant educator and a friend of all, and particularly he was an expert counsellor and a delicate director of consciences. Popes and cardinals, bishops and priests, princes and politicians, religious and artists, had recourse to him: illustrious persons, such as the historian Cesare Baronio and the famous composer Palestrina, St Charles Borromeo and St Ignatius of Loyola, and Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, confided in his

heart, the heart of a father and friend.

But that poor, little room in his apartment was above all the goal of an immense multitude of humble persons of the people, the suffering, the disinherited, the outcasts of society, young people, children, who flocked to him, to receive advice, forgiveness, peace, encouragement, material and spiritual aid. St Philip's beneficial activity was such and so great that the Magistrature of Rome decreed to give a chalice to his church every year on the anniversary of his death, as a sign of veneration and gratitude.

Living in a dramatic age, intoxicated by the discoveries of human genius and of classical and pagan art, but which was going through a radical crisis owing to the change in mentality, St Philip, a man of deep faith and a fervent, brilliant and far-sighted priest, endowed also with special charisms, was able to maintain intact the deposit of truth received and handed it down, complete and pure, putting it into practice entirely in his life and proclaiming it uncompromisingly.

For this reason his message is always a topical one and we must listen to him and follow his example.

In the precious mine of his teachings and the anecdotes about his life, always so interesting and fascinating, some perspectives can be said to be particularly relevant for the world today.

This is St Philip's first appeal.

In fact, a fundamental danger is the pride of intelligence. St Philip saw it flourishing in a frightful way in that independent and rebellious age, and therefore he laid particular stress on the humility of reason and on interior penitence. Intelligence is a gift from God which makes man similar to Him; but intelligence must accept its limits.

Intelligence must reach the necessary and absolute Principle which governs the universe; recognize the historical proofs which show the divinity of Jesus Christ and the divine mission of the Church; and then stop before the mystery of God, who, being infinite, always remains obscure in his nature and in his operations. Intelligence must accept his law, which is a law of love and salvation and abandon itself trustfully to his plan, which, being eternal, transcends every human perspective ontologically.

St Philip emphasized this sense of humility before God. Putting his hand to his forehead, he was accustomed to say: "Holiness lies in the space of three fingers!", meaning that it depends essentially on the humility of the intelligence.

This is the second teaching of St Philip, a very valid one and still relevant today.

With Christian wisdom he was able to draw from the principles of faith the deep reasons for his activity and his whole life. And from this logic of faith there arose spontaneously a life-style marked by joy, trust, serenity, healthy optimism, which is not trivial and insensitive easy-goingness, but is a transcendent vision of history, an eschatological vision of human reality. From this interior joy, there sprang the extraordinary strength of his apostolate and his delicate and proverbial humor, for which he was called the "saint of joy" and his house was known as the "house of gaiety". On this gentle and austere, joyful and committed life-style, he founded the "Oratory", which spread all over the world and which, among so many other merits, had also that of the development of music and sacred song.

St Paul wrote: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance" (Phil 4:4-5).

Such was St Philip: a man of joy and forbearance. God grant that each of us may also be able to enjoy this joy which springs from convinced and lived Christian faith.

This is a third teaching of our saint, which is extremely topical and necessary.

St Philip, in full respect of individual personalities, based his "educational project" on the reality of "grace" and developed it along five main guidelines: delicate knowledge of every individual child and youth through patient and affectionate listening—the enlightening of the mind with the truths of faith by means of readings and meditations—eucharistic and Marian devotion—charity for one's neighbour—play in its most varied manifestations.

The world of today is in extreme need of sensitive and qualified educators, who will teach their pupils to overcome the sadness and sense of loneliness and incommunicability which torments so many young people and sometimes even destroys them.

Like St Philip, you, too, parents and educators, teach "whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise" (Phil 4:8).

Beloved Faithful of Rome!

How many things we can and must learn from our great Saint! He speaks to each of us: "Cor ad cor loquitur", as the great Cardinal Newman, converted from Anglicanism, used to say. When, after long and meticulous historical researches and after interior suffering, he was obliged by the evidence of the proofs to embrace Catholicism and enter the Church of Rome, becoming acquainted with the life and spirituality of St Philip, he became so enamoured of him, because of his depth, balance and discretion, that he wished to become an Oratorian priest. He founded the first Oratory in England, always followed his example, as his admirable addresses bear witness,

and called him "my personal Father and Patron Saint". He concluded his most famous work: "Apologia pro vita sua" with the name of St Philip.

For us, too, St Philip continues to be our "Father". Let us invoke him! Let us listen to him! One of his most lovable characteristics was his tender love for the Blessed Virgin, whom he frequently invoked as "Mater gratiae", with complete and filial confidence.

He would say, full of tenderness for the Mother of Heaven: "This reason alone should be enough to keep a member of the faithful joyful, the knowledge that he has the Virgin Mary praying for him, close to God" (*Vita di San Filippo Neri Fiorentino*, written by Fr Pietro Giacomo Bacci).

Let us listen to him, St Philip Neri, convinced that he who loved Rome so much when he was alive, continues to protect and help his sons.

And now, before beginning the liturgy of the Sacrifice, let us think for a moment of what happened in our beloved city of Rome a few days ago: the atrocious death of a young Somalian, who had emigrated here, an unknowing victim of an absurd act, has raised a movement of indignation and protest all over the world and has rent also my fatherly heart. And now, let us raise a prayer for the poor deceased and for all the victims of cruelty and human violence, and above all let us promise, each one personally in his own sphere and under his own responsibility, to live the Gospel with absolute faithfulness, following in the footsteps of St Philip Neri.

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