

St Philip Neri:

"Well, friends. When shall we have a mind to begin to do good?"

There is a quality in the lives of the great saints that can be difficult to understand. A saint is more than a person of admirable life. In the saint there exists a supernatural force that defies usual categories and can unite seemingly opposite tendencies. Yet the saints give no hint of a divided spirit or a lack of equilibrium; none are so truly themselves, none so much at ease in their personalities as are the saints. In this they imitate the character of their divine model. It is not easy to categorize the personality of Jesus: he expresses too many sides to be easily pinned down. He can be poignantly tender, and he can be harsh and unyielding. He might be humble to the point of embarrassment and then carry himself with a majesty beyond that of kings. He was a man of sorrows, but he communicated deep joy. He preached an almost impossibly high moral call, yet sinful people flocked to be near him.

In Christ these seeming opposites did not produce a chaotic identity. He is an unforgettably complete character. His divinity brought his human personality to an integration higher than was possible for the natural man. This complexity of character helps to explain why there are so many flattened pictures of Christ in the air. We reduce him to the small categories taught us by our fallen humanity; with our limited sight we see only one of his many dimensions, and we then declare that we have found the "real" Christ: He was a political rebel; he was a gentle childlike spirit; he was a radical prophet; he was an unworldly mystic; he was a breaker of conventions who spoke truth to power; he was a moral genius; he was a deluded narcissist. Yet the supposed Jesus we create this way always remains unreal and uninspired, while the true Jesus continues to emerge from the pages of the New Testament as the most vividly real personality in history.

The same operation of reduction is often performed upon the saints. Thus some will see in Thomas More a split personality: a man full of the new currents of the age and yet shackled to an old idea; a person of humor and tenderness, yet a stern opponent of heretics; a lover of friends and good cheer who found himself locked in the Tower because of strange moral scruples. It seems, when viewed according to this reductive lens, that the poor man could not decide who he really wanted to be. Yet the true Thomas More is a beautifully whole personality. The same saintly pattern continually recurs. We can see it in Francis of Assisi, the great lover of creation who practiced a fierce asceticism, the joyful minstrel of the Lord who went blind weeping for sins. We find it in Ignatius, the efficient general who threw his men almost carelessly into battle and yet loved them with a father's tenderness, the consummate man of action who was yet a mystic and a master of the interior

life. It is present in Therese of Lisieux, who spent her few adult years in the seclusion of a Carmelite cloister and yet became patroness of the missions; in Mother Teresa, who experienced an anguishing inner crucifixion and yet radiated life-giving joy to all those she encountered. In the saints these seeming paradoxes are not really in opposition to each other; they resolve themselves at a higher level of integration into a new kind of character after the fashion of Christ. It may be that St. Paul had something like this in mind when he wrote, "The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one" (1 Cor 2:15).

This saintly quality of resolving opposites into an integrated personality is emphatically present in Philip Neri: the desert father in the midst of bustling Rome, the practical joker whom everyone took seriously, the admirer of the grim reformer Savonarola who wooed souls with sweetness, the lover of obedience who cherished personal freedom, the austere ascetic who loved to see people around him enjoying life, the profound mystic who put little stock in spiritual experience, the man who saw the best in everyone else and detected a devil in himself. Yet there is hardly a historical character who is more recognizably whole, more completely himself, than Neri. He wrote little, and he established a religious congregation almost by accident. But the city where he spent most of his life has not been able to forget the imprint of his personality. He belongs to the Eternal City as truly as its piazzas and its dishes of pasta. Rome would not be quite itself without Philip leading his hundreds to the Seven Churches, laughing and praying with his companions among the streets and hills, and haunting the steps of the great basilicas in the quiet of the night as he read his solitary prayers by moonlight.

Philip in Florence

Philip Neri was born in 1515 in the city of Florence. His family was what we would now call middle-class, though impoverished through his father's lack of financial sense. His mother died when Philip was young, but his family circle was a warm one: his stepmother had a great affection for Philip, and he and his two sisters got along well. Philip left Florence and his family at the age of eighteen to take a position in a business run by a childless uncle looking for an heir. It was a good opportunity, favored by his family, so Philip made the journey to a small town south of Rome close to Monte Cassino, Benedict's famous monastery. He was never to return to his home or his family, but he kept his Florentine identity for the rest of his life.

The importance of Florence for Philip's later life came mostly through his warm attachment to one of Florence's great personages, the impressive and perplexing Girolamo Savonarola, who had died twenty years before Philip's birth. Savonarola

was a Dominican friar who had gained prominence as an itinerant preacher. He was a man of intense spiritual life, a mystic, and, so he and many others said, a prophet. He arrived in Florence and was elected prior of the Dominican house at San Marco. His preaching began to have a great effect in the city. He called for repentance of individual believers, the reform of the Church, and an end to government abuses, lest the judgment of God descend upon Florence and Italy. Three years into his cycle of preaching, Charles VIII of France brought an invading army into northern Italy in what seemed to be a fulfillment of Savonarola's prophecies, and the autocratic Medici rulers were chased from the city. Now the most influential person in Florence, Savonarola instituted a republican constitution along with stringent reforms of clergy and laity.

O Italy, O princes of Italy, O prelates of the Church, the wrath of God is over you, and you will not have any cure unless you mend your ways! O consecrated priests, hear my words, O priests, O prelates of the Church of Christ, renounce your benefices that you cannot serve; renounce your pomp and your convivial gatherings and the banquets which you give so splendidly; renounce, I say, your concubines and your boys, for it is time I say to do penance, because from all these things come the great tribulations by which God desires to mend His Church. Say your masses with devotion; if you do not, if you are not willing to understand what God wants, in the end you will lose both benefices and life! O monks, renounce the extravagance of your attire and your silver vessels and the over-running fatness of your abbeys and benefices. Give yourselves over to simplicity; and work with your hands as did the ancient monks, your fathers, and your predecessors; otherwise, if you do not do it willingly, there will come a time when you will be forced to do it! O nuns, renounce, renounce you, too, your extravagances; renounce your simonies when you accept, as nuns, those who come to stay in your monasteries; renounce your many decorations and your exceeding pomp when your sisters are consecrated; renounce your florid chants. I tell you that the time to weep is coming rather than the time to sing and give feasts, because God will punish you if you do not change your life and habits!

O my brothers, to you I say: Renounce your extravagance, your paintings, and your vain ornaments. Make your robes less full and of thinner material. Do you not realize that your extravagances are taking alms away from the poor? I declare to you that if you will not listen to the voice of God, He will punish you. O merchants, renounce your usuries; give back other people's belongings and the things you have dishonestly taken; otherwise you will lose everything. O you who have anything superfluous, give it to the poor, for it is not yours! 1

A man with this kind of message was bound to make both devoted disciples and powerful enemies. Among those who opposed Savonarola was the reigning pope,

Alexander VI, whose dissolute exercise of the papacy was coming under attack from the prophet's reforming fire. The opponents of Savonarola eventually found a way to silence his voice. After effectively ruling Florence for four years, Savonarola was taken by his enemies and put to death. The friars of San Marco viewed him as a martyr and a saint, and they kept his memory and his writings alive. Philip's family were among his devotees, and it was by those friars that the young Philip was nurtured in the Faith. He later said to a Dominican friend, "Whatever good there has been in me from the first I owe to your Fathers of San Marco." To the end of his life, Philip kept Savonarola's picture in his room, and he always spoke of him with great respect. By personality, the two men were almost entirely dissimilar. But Neri learned much from Savonarola and found himself in sympathy with the fiery Dominican in at least three important matters that would mark the whole of his life and his apostolate. The first was their shared insertion into a deep and intense mystical experience of God's presence. The second was an ardent desire for the reform of the Church. The third was a love of genuine freedom in all its forms. Each of these would come into play as Philip's life unfolded.

Philip as a Desert Father in Rome: "If I had wanted wealth, I could have been a rich man." So said Philip many years later. His decision to leave his uncle's business was more than a change of place or career. Like the rich young man, he had heard the call of Christ to sell all, to give what he had to the poor, and to follow the Good Teacher. Unlike the man in the Gospel, Philip responded to that call with great joy. The world with its wealth and its prestige held no attractions for him. "Nothing in this world pleases me," he once said. "But it is just this that pleases me: that nothing pleases me." So after a year or so, he left his uncle's business, turned his steps toward Rome, and upon arriving, took a simple lodging in the home of a customs agent named Caccia. There he tutored Caccia's two sons in return for a simple room and a weekly sack of flour. He would live there for the next sixteen years, presenting nothing in external appearance to excite interest: a poor young man, clean, amiable, and polite, going about his daily routines, chatting with people he met, making himself a familiar sight in the squares and churches of old Rome. Yet these same years, outwardly so uneventful, concealed an extraordinary spiritual drama as Philip's vocation was slowly made clear to him by his Master.

Many years later, Cardinal Federico Borromeo, the cousin of St. Charles, paid a visit to his good friend Neri. He came upon Philip reading a volume about the desert fathers, those pioneers of monasticism who had fled the cities of the ancient world to live austere as hermits in the Egyptian desert. "I am reading about

people who lived as I live," Philip told him, "As odd as it sounded for a man who made his home in the heart of Rome, it was simply true. Philip was greatly taken by primitive Christianity, and he viewed himself as a kind of urban desert monk. He slept little, ate little, and prayed constantly. At the deepest level of his being, he was always a lover of solitude, and he sought times and places where he could be alone with his Lord apart from the eyes of others. Prayer came to him as an almost natural state; it was an effort for him not to pray. His favorite time for prayer was at night. He preferred lodgings at the top of the house from where he could see the sky and the stars and slip onto the roof as a kind of monkish cell. He took to wandering the city by night, visiting the basilicas in turn and praying at each, a habit that he later continued with his disciples and friends as the visitation of the Seven Churches. He spent whole nights praying in the catacombs of San Sebastiano, delighting in being close to the remains of Christians from the primitive Church.

During one of these vigils in the catacombs, in his twenty-ninth year, Philip experienced what some have called his "Pentecost." Philip's earliest biographer has described the event. "It was habitual with Philip to pray each day to the Holy Spirit, and with great humility to ask Him for His gifts and graces." On this occasion, as he was praying, "he suddenly felt himself divinely filled with the power of the Spirit with such force that his heart began to palpitate within his body and to be inflamed with such love, that he was completely unable to bear it." Philip spoke with almost no one about what had happened; but many years later he described the experience to his friend and confidante Pietro Consolini as a ball of fire that had entered through his mouth and had come to rest over his heart, giving him a sensation of inner burning. The effect was so overpowering that he found himself writhing on the ground, shouting out, "Enough, Lord, enough! I can't handle any more!"

The experience left a physical mark: to the day he died, there was a growth over Philip's heart that his physicians could not account for. Upon his death it was found that his heart had been enlarged, and that the ribs over the heart had been forced outward to give it room. From that point onward, Philip's heart gave out a constant heat, such that he would go without a coat and keep the windows in his room open even in the middle of winter. Many witnesses remembered that warmth, along with palpitations of heart so strong that they would set the bench upon which Philip was sitting violently shaking, especially if he were in the midst of prayer. It was as though the gift of a new heart, the change that happens to every Christian, was so complete in Philip that he was imprinted with a visible sign of an inner transformation, a kind of stigmata of the Holy Spirit. Philip was regularly heard by

those closest to him to repeat a phrase from the Song of Songs, one that had so often been on the lips of Catherine of Genoa: "I am wounded by love!" (cf. Sg 2:5, 5:8).

Philip would eventually become well known, a friend of popes and cardinals, the wonder and joy of Rome. But all the triumphs of his later apostolate were rooted in this long period of prayer and solitude, as he was tutored by God for the mission to which he was called. There is a Nazareth-like quality to these early years: quiet, hidden, and humble and yet preparing the world for a great outpouring of grace.

Philip as Apostle of Rome: Philip arrived in Rome in 1534. Just a few years previously, Rome had been put through the horrific ordeal of being sacked by an out-of-control imperial army. The city was nearly destroyed in that carnage. The population of Rome was decimated, going from around fifty thousand to something like fifteen thousand; houses and buildings were burned, diseases raged due to the rotting of dead bodies in the streets, food was scarce and many were starving. It was months before any kind of order began to be restored. Seven years later, upon his arrival Philip encountered a city that still bore the ravages and the memory of that horror. Even as he arrived, Michelangelo was setting to work on the magnificent Last Judgment scene in the Sistine Chapel—a work inspired by Savonarola's prophecies of a coming wrath upon Rome, which was driven home by the depredations of the imperial armies.

If the material state of Rome was in ruins, the spiritual state of the city was little better. When in 1537 Pope Paul III constituted a committee to bring recommendations for reform, appointing Cardinals Contarini and Carafa as its chief members, the account they gave him of Rome's spiritual atmosphere was harsh. "The city and the Church of Rome," they wrote, "is the mother and teacher of the other churches. Therefore in her especially divine worship and integrity of morals ought to flourish." But what was the reality? Visitors were scandalized by the "vile and ignorant priests" who offered Mass at St. Peter's. In the city at large "harlots walked about like matrons or [rode] on mules attended in broad daylight by noble members of the cardinals' households and by clerics." Among the populace there were "hatreds and animosities" that needed mediation lest they tear the city apart.

Yet Rome was on the cusp of a great change. During the fifty years of Philip's residence, Rome would be transformed, physically and spiritually. The population would again begin to surge, surpassing one hundred thousand by the end of the century. New buildings would go up, streets and squares would be laid out, and

pilgrims would descend upon the city by the thousands. A new reforming spirit would be blowing through Rome, affecting everyone from popes and cardinals to artisans and merchants, a spirit due in no small part to Philip's apostolic work. This was the atmosphere of tumult, change corruption, and renewal that would be Philip's arena of action. Despite his love of solitude and prayer, Philip was, paradoxically, an approachable and gregarious man whose geniality invited friendship. He was warm and companionable with a characteristically Florentine sense of ironic humor; and what was yet more attractive, he was genuinely interested in everyone he met. He had the gift of being all things to all men, without losing a sense of his own personality. His love for Christ led him to find ways, as he simply put it, "to bring men to God, and God to men." Philip was therefore alert to the specific qualities of the world around him and attentive to the spiritual currents moving in that world, as he sought to find his own path of service to Christ.

One spiritual current he soon encountered ran through the hospital of San Giacomo. From his earliest days in Rome, Philip had frequented the hospitals; he always had a special tenderness toward those who were sick or close to death. The hospital of San Giacomo had been set aside especially for the poor and the incurable, a place sure to attract Philip. There he found a circle of disciples formed in the spirit of the Oratory of Divine Love, the lay fraternity founded on Catherine of Genoa's life of prayer and charity. This fraternity he joined. Another strong spiritual current came in the form of Ignatius and his companions. The "pilgrim priests" arrived in 1538, and Philip was greatly moved by their preaching and their service to the poor. Philip met Francis Xavier numerous times during that first year; it is not hard to imagine those two warm hearts finding an easy sympathy. Ignatius had hoped that Philip would join the Jesuits, and Philip found much to admire in the Jesuit spirit and way of life. But though he eventually sent many men to join their ranks, he himself was averse to joining a religious order. He knew that God's way with him would demand a kind of freedom that he would not find in one of the traditional orders. His path lay elsewhere.

Still another current was running at San Girolamo della Carita, the Church where Philip would eventually find a beloved home. A group of priests, again influenced by the Oratory of Divine Love, had formed there the "Confraternity of Charity" to bring priestly care to the poorest and neediest of Rome's population. Among them Philip met Persiano Rosa, who became his confessor and close friend, and who had much to do with helping him clarify his vocation. Philip and Rosa established a confraternity to care for the throng of poor pilgrims visiting Rome for the jubilee year of 1550, an initiative that became well known and brought Philip into the

public eye. It was Rosa who strongly recommended to Philip that he become a priest. This was a step Philip had never intended; he had thought to serve God as a layman. But Rosa saw that the priesthood would allow Philip's apostolic gifts their fullest expression. If it was true that Philip loved freedom, it was also true that he knew how to obey. With the example of the desert monks before him, he took the words of his spiritual father as the will of God. He was ordained a priest in 1551, at the age of thirty-six.

There is something striking about the long period of time it took for Philip's vocation to come to full maturity. A similar pattern can be seen in St. Ignatius's pursuit of his vocation. Ignatius was converted at thirty, ordained a priest sixteen years later, and became general of the new Society of Jesus at the age of fifty. Philip embraced discipleship at eighteen, was ordained at thirty-six, and saw his famous Oratory founded only at the age of sixty. Yet neither of these men were missing God's will or wasting their time in the long years during which their vocation ripened. They were being prepared for their mission field, and their mission field was being prepared for them. At the time of his ordination, Philip was still searching for the specific contours of his mission. At one point, he and some of his young disciples were reading Francis Xavier's letters written from India, and the whole group was taken by a desire to follow in the great missionary's footsteps.

Twenty young men told Philip that if he would lead them, they were ready to serve as missionaries in India, even to the shedding of their blood. Philip's missionary heart was deeply stirred, and he wondered if this was to be his calling. To settle the question he characteristically went in search of someone who could speak God's mind to him. At the Carthusian monastery of Tre Fontane there lived a monk wise in the ways of discernment who had a devotion to John the Baptist. Philip laid the question of the Indian mission before him, and the Carthusian promised to pray. He received a vision from the Baptist, who gave a decisive answer to Philip's question: "Rome is to be your India." For Philip this direction was decisive. From that point on he set himself to cultivate the mission his Master had entrusted to him, and he never again left the city.

The great instrument of Philip's apostolate was the confessional. Philip was a master of the spiritual life and had an innate sense of what a given individual needed in order to progress. He had a kind of genius for understanding young men, who found him sympathetic and interesting. Ambitious worldlings, who would listen to no one else about faith or virtue, would gladly listen to Philip. And he, having once brought them to a point of repentance, would encourage frequent

confession—sometimes daily—to see them safely on their way. He was the consummate spiritual director. He had no method; he handled each person as an individual. He knew when to hit hard and when to be gentle; he knew what kinds of remedies were needed for which kinds of people. Msgr. Ronald Knox once wrote of him: "He didn't just love people, with a fond love that made him blind to their shortcomings; he loved their souls; loved, with a fierce, supernatural jealousy, the image of Christ in them. And at the same time, it was an individual love of souls; there was nothing in him of the ecclesiastical recruiting sergeant who tries to send people to heaven by numbers." Philip's preference for prayerful solitude allowed him to be close to his disciples without inserting himself into their lives in unhealthy ways. He had no need for their affection or adulation and so was able to love them with great freedom.

The fruit of Philip's gift of spiritual leadership was a growing band of young men who wanted to be near him as often as possible. They developed the habit of visiting him in the afternoon, and in order to keep them busy, he would organize outings. The group would visit the Seven Churches, stopping along the way at some chosen spot to sing or enact a play and to take a meal. These outings that began with twenty or thirty companions eventually grew to hundreds and even on special feast days, to thousands. It became one of Rome's characteristic sights. "Ecco Filipponel" the onlookers would shout, as Philip would lead his crowds to the churches, praying and singing and laughing as they went their way. Later on a smaller group of close disciples would end the day with talk and prayer in Philip's rooms. Philip's gift of prayer seemed to spill over onto those in his company, as if his union with God opened a window upon Heaven. One man who frequented those early gatherings described the experience: "The Father prayed, and we saw his intense fervor; his whole body was shaken, and he seemed to tremble as he spoke with God, and although the prayer may have lasted for an hour, it seemed very short to us, and we could have stopped there all night, so great was the sweetness that we felt."

Out of these gatherings, the famous Oratory developed. The group of those closest to Philip would meet for a time of prayer, reading, and discussion. First it was a few, then more, and finally too many to fit into their small meeting space. It was not long before the Oratory became well known and even fashionable. Men of all ranks began to attend, priests and cardinals drew life from it, and there were notable conversions that had Roman tongues wagging. The great composers Palestrina and Animuccia took Philip as their confessor and often brought musicians to the Oratory, even writing music for the meetings. Charles Borromeo was a great friend of the Oratory and invited them to establish a house in Milan. As

the Oratory grew, the need for priests to serve it grew as well, and from the ranks of the Oratory came the Congregation of the Oratory. That congregation of priests and brothers was officially established in 1575. Philip always insisted that he had founded nothing. It was Christ and Our Lady who had brought the Oratory about. Much has been said about Philip's sense of fun and of the practical jokes he would set, making either himself or someone else the object of laughter. The stories are amusing and worth retelling, but often enough, the true character and point of these little escapades is misunderstood. Philip put great store by cheerfulness. "The cheerful are much easier to guide in the spiritual life than the melancholy," he would say. "The true way to advance in holy virtues is to persevere in a holy cheerfulness."

Sometimes his jokes were meant to shake a young friend out of the lassitude of melancholy so that he could recover his "holy cheerfulness." Sometimes, as when he commanded a young nobleman to walk through Rome carrying an ugly dog in his arms, it was medicine for vanity. He also had a nose for cant and posturing, and especially as he grew more famous and people began to speak of him in awed tones, he would find ways to restore them, and himself, to a clearer picture. This was the likely motive behind the way he surprised a highborn lady who introduced him to her circle of friends by arriving at her home with his beard half shaved off. But Philip was never clownish. This maxim was also his: "It is very necessary to be cheerful, but we must not on that account give in to a buffooning, spirit. Buffoonery incapacitates a person from receiving any additional spirituality from God, and it roots up the little a man may have already acquired."

It can be instructive to set these two great saints, Ignatius! Loyola and Philip Neri, side by side. Both the differences between them and their friendship amid those differences are significant. The comparison tells us something about the Church, and about God's way of guiding and reforming her. The two men shared all the most important things: both were great lovers of God and great mystics; both loved Christ's Church and honored her traditions; they were zealous for God's glory; they loved the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience; and they were missionaries at heart. They were also, in their own distinctive ways, winning personalities and natural leaders of men. But their modes of pursuing their mission differed greatly. Ignatius was an organizer and systematizer; it was his special genius to work his insights into methods and structures that could easily be replicated. Philip knew nothing of systems; events just tended to happen around him. He resisted spiritual methods, wanting to deal with each person as a unique individual. Ignatius founded a religious order that was highly effective in communal enterprises. The Jesuits grew rapidly, and their history has shown both

the strength and the potential perils of such an instrument. Philip was not interested in founding a religious order at all. The Oratory did not grow with anything like the rapidity or to anything like the size of the Jesuits. Ignatius, perhaps expressing his hidalgo origins, put great emphasis on obedience. Philip, maybe due to his Florentine background, set up a priestly life that functioned, in the words of one of his disciples, like a well-run republic. Ignatius, with his notion of light infantry, wanted his men ready to respond at a moment's notice to whatever they were given to do, wherever it led. The Jesuits were to be a kind of army, possessed of a martial spirit. Philip wanted the Oratory to root itself in a specific place and to take its complexion from that place. He built the Oratory to be a home, guided by a family spirit. Ignatius was ready to send Xavier off to the Indies even before his new Society was established. Philip was reluctant to send any of his men away from Rome even when pressed hard by such a one as Charles Borromeo.

It could be tempting to think that these two approaches to life and apostolate, so different in spirit, were simply incompatible; one or the other must be mistaken. Yet these two men were friends, and their missionary and pastoral strategies have both been embraced by the Church. G.K. Chesterton once wrote that the Church is the true home of everything truly human. Philip and Ignatius each represent something vital in the redeemed human spirit, and the Church has allowed neither to get lost. Freedom and obedience, individual initiative and communal effort, the love of the local and the embrace of the universal: all human values find their harmonious order in Christ's Body.

Philip died in 1595 and during his lifetime gave little impetus to the expansion of new Oratories. He seemed to think that the Oratory was a unique thing, essentially Roman in origin and scope. He desired the Oratory to savor of the soil in which it was founded so as to meet the specific needs of that place, and he resisted its development in a direction that we might in a different context call franchising. Nonetheless, the seemingly accidental development of the Oratory became one of the great reforming instruments of the next century. Something like 150 Oratories were established during this period, in Italy and Spain especially, and also in France, though the French Oratory took a different turn and established itself more as a centralized religious order than as a congregation of independent houses according to the Philippian model. John Henry Newman noted that Philip and his sons were given the task of the reform of the diocesan clergy, as reform of religious clergy was entrusted to Ignatius. Philip's influence can also be detected outside the Oratory proper: it has run like a subterranean current of spiritual life, irrigating and nourishing other minds and movements. Great saints such as Charles Borromeo, Francis de Sales, and Vincent de Paul were formed to different degrees

in Philip's spirituality and priestly model, and their work and the congregations they founded carried that spirit forward under different colors. The devotion to the Sacred Heart owes much to Philip's oblique influence. He was one of the great reforming saints of the Catholic Reformation.

When Philip Neri, Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, Teresa of Avila, and Isidore the Farmer were raised to the altars on the same day in 1622, a typical bit of Neri-like humor went around the streets of Rome: "Did you hear who they canonized today? Four Spaniards and a saint!" The people of Rome, we can suppose, were happy enough to acknowledge the sanctity of those four Spaniards once it had been declared by the pope. But of that other, they had no doubt. They had already unofficially declared his status and taken him to their hearts. He was their own saint, their beloved Filippo Buono; and they spontaneously gave him the title that has since belonged to him, even in the city of the great saints Peter and Paul: the Apostle of Rome.