



## The Oratory of Saint Philip Neri



AT TIMES LIKE these, it is difficult to know where to start in telling you what has happened since our last newsletter in October. Living during a pandemic seems to demand almost constant improvising and adjusting; almost everything feels new and almost nothing steady and reliable. But God always brings something out of the mess and surprises us with his blessings. We have so very much for which we should be grateful.

### *Father Jonathan Robinson's Anniversary*

June 3<sup>rd</sup> was the first anniversary of Father Jonathan Robinson's death. As is so often the case with monumental events, it feels like yesterday that it happened but also like years ago. On the first anniversary, we celebrated Vespers of the Dead together as a community, as we had done the evening before his funeral. Sung Vespers has always been an important part of our Oratorian life, and we still imagine it with Father Robinson as celebrant. It seems a particularly fitting

way of marking the day. You can watch the recording on the Oratory YouTube channel.

Soon after his death, many people joined together to contribute to the volume *Remembering Father Robinson: Essays on his Life and Spirituality*, published by Justin Press. Many of you have already acquired a copy of this lovely book. If you have not, you can still get one, either through Justin Press or through the Oratory Bookstall.

The Oratorian brothers, under the direction of Carter West, created an hour-long documentary tribute to Father Robinson for last year's Oratory Summer School. It tells the story of the foundation of the Toronto Oratory and its development over the years. It is both fascinating and particularly well done. For the anniversary, a newly edited version was posted on our YouTube channel—*In Memoriam: Fr Jonathan Robinson, Founder of the Toronto Oratory*. I encourage you to take a look at it. It is a moving record of providence at work.





### Ordinations

The Saturday before the lockdown in November (God takes good care of us) Thomas Cardinal Collins came to celebrate the diaconal ordinations of Brothers Alexander Griffiths and Christopher Huynh. The joyful event was, of course, limited to a few people, like ordinations in the early Church. The full video of the ordination ceremony is still available on our YouTube channel. Since then, our two deacons have been preaching regularly and assisting at masses as they exercise their new responsibilities. We hope for a much more public celebration for their upcoming ordinations to the priesthood. A date will be announced sometime soon.

### Sacramental and Devotional Work

Although Covid-19 has limited our freedom to gather and celebrate the sacraments in our accustomed way, our spiritual and sacramental needs did not disappear because of the lockdown. The challenge was to balance the need for safety with the reality of our need for spiritual nourishment. Following the directives of the Archdiocese of Toronto's WorshipSafe protocols, we were determined to do all that we could within those limits—follow the regulations and don't be afraid to do what you need to do. Of course, what we were able to do was possible only because we are a community of priests and brothers. It is hard to imagine living through these times as solitary priests without the support of a community. Our prayers are with those priests who have struggled alone through the past year.

Whenever the church was able to be open, we allowed private prayers and confessions. Around Christmas, we were permitted to begin communion services. We worked out a system of running these services every fifteen minutes, from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Sunday. The possible time-slots filled quickly. It was encouraging to see the number of people for whom online mass was simply not enough. They needed to receive communion. When masses were able to resume, we instituted a revised Sunday schedule at Holy Family Church with an extra mass in the morning and another in the afternoon, to accommodate as many people as possible. Confessions continue to be fifteen minutes before every mass, every day. We have been happy to provide the sacraments to our regular parishioners and for many from other parishes less fortunate than our own.

Many of the fathers and brothers have devised ways of keeping in touch with people and supporting their spiritual lives during the lockdown. International Rosaries and daily Night Prayer, a Novena to Saint Philip, the Little Oratory, Bible Study, and RCIA were all able to take place online, not to mention countless phone calls and Zoom meetings.



We are blessed not only with people who are able to provide these services, but also with those who can manage the technology required to make it happen. Again, I cannot help but think that none of this could happen if it weren't for a community of diverse talents working together.

We were delighted that we were able to hold this year's Summer School both in person and online. Although it was a blessing to be able to have Summer School last year online, being able to be together physically for classes has always been an important part of the Summer School experience. The encouragement that comes from gathering with like-minded people is difficult to replace. It is our plan to continue offering the course online to make it available to as many people as possible, but we are grateful that in-person classes have resumed.

### Saint Philip's Seminary

The new Seminary building is progressing. It is exciting to see it take shape after months and months of planning and preparation. There have been Covid delays and cost overruns, of course, but the finish line is within sight. We are so grateful to everyone who has helped make this project possible through their prayers and support of our *Renovatio* building campaign, our annual appeal, and through individual donations. We hope to have a fine facility for training

priests for a new generation of Catholics.

This year eight alumni of Saint Philip's are to be ordained around the world. The ceremonies might not have been quite what we have become accustomed to, because of the restrictions imposed, but each and every new priest is a cause of celebration. We welcome these eight into the ranks of Christ's priesthood. Now more than 225 alumni of Saint Philip's Seminary have been ordained.

In apparent response to your generosity, God has seen fit to send us seminarians to fill the new building this fall. We have accepted students for residence in the Seminary from the United States, England, France, and of course Canada. And those are merely the seminarians in residence; others will be in formation with religious communities and other formation programs while coming here for their studies. We continue to offer courses online as well as in person, with Oratorian seminarians joining our classes from England and from Wales. It looks like we truly needed the new facilities! With all of these possible vocations arriving on our doorstep in the fall, please pray for the timely completion of the building, and for the safe arrival of our seminarians.





### *Evolving Ways to Donate to the Oratory*

The simplest way to give to the Oratory is to send us a cheque or an Interac e-transfer.

1. By cheque: please make sure that you make it payable to “The Oratory of St. Philip Neri - Toronto”. The bank will no longer cash cheques to “The Toronto Oratory” or the “The Oratory - Toronto” or “Renovatio”.
2. By Interac e-transfer: please send your donation to **etransfer.oratory@gmail.com**. There is no need to provide us with a password. Funds sent to that address are autodeposited.

You can also give by credit card through CanadaHelps.org or contacting us directly by phone.

If you would like to donate securities, please contact us for more information.



We have been carried through these difficult times by an awareness of God’s constant graces and blessings, and by your concern and support. May you and your family be supported, in return, by our daily prayers for you. We look forward to more times in the future when we can gather together in person and show you first-hand the work your support and generosity have made possible. 🌿



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