



## The Oratory of Saint Philip Neri



IN THE MIDST of pandemic shutdowns and enforced closures, you might expect that there would be little news to pass on to you from the Toronto Oratory, except perhaps stories of perseverance and determination. But life here has been very different from that. It has been remarkably busy—and remarkably blessed.

### *Our Sacramental Work*

Throughout the pandemic we have been operating on the principle that “Whatever we **can** do, we **will** do.” When gatherings for mass were not permitted in our province, we conducted communion services every fifteen minutes—in at the front door and out at the side door! Once masses were permitted, but with only a limited capacity, we provided as many masses as the schedule would allow in order to accommodate all the faithful who were able and willing to attend. Many neighbouring parishes were unable to do anything like this because they are manned by one or

two priests. With a community of priests, however, we could—and so we did. People from all over the city came to these simple, quiet masses. They wanted to be physically present for the sacrifice of the mass. At Holy Family Parish, we have been offering three weekday and eight Sunday masses, together with one weekday and four Sunday masses at Saint Vincent de Paul Parish. Because of the sheer number of masses offered, people who wanted to attend mass in person were able to do so, despite the capacity limits. Now the capacity limits have been lifted and preparations for First Holy Communion and Confirmation are able to proceed more normally. The first weekend without capacity limits was a joyful event. Perhaps it is a strange way to begin Lent, but after almost exactly two years we’ll take our blessings whenever they are sent!

Although confessionals were not permitted to be used until very recently, we were able to improvise to make the sacrament of confession available many



times a day to those who desired it. We began by hearing confessions outside in courtyards (it was often very cold!) and on screened porches. Gradually we were able to use small rooms with enough space for keeping appropriate distance. We were determined that anyone who wanted to receive the sacrament of confession during this time should have access to it. People who had previously never attended our parishes have come, received the sacraments and stayed connected to the Church in these challenging times.

From the time of Saint Philip Oratorians have not gathered together for common recitation of the breviary, but Sunday Vespers celebrated solemnly in public has always been a defining part of our life. Many years ago, as a layman, I would make the trip across town to the Oratory on Sunday afternoons to hear the beautiful chant and polyphony sung by the Oratory choir. The simple ceremony, the splendid music, the spiritual depth of the psalms, and the veneration of the Blessed Sacrament were spiritually nourishing and invigorating. Vespers and Benediction became for me (who attended mass daily) a part of what made Sunday different, reverent and holy. For two years (both because of the restrictions on congregational singing, and because we needed the time slot for an additional mass) we have not celebrated Solemn Vespers on Sunday. But now we are reintroducing it. We are so grateful for this additional sign of life, both physical and spiritual, returning to normal. If you are in the area, it is worth the effort.

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#### *The Priestly Ordination*

Much of this sacramental work is possible only because of the number of priestly vocations with which God has blessed our community. Since our last newsletter, two new Toronto Oratorians have been ordained priests, Fr

Alexander Griffiths and Fr Christopher Huynh. On November the 6<sup>th</sup>, the feast of the first Oratorian martyr, Blessed Salvio Huix-Miralpeix (who died in the Spanish Civil War), we were honoured to have Thomas Cardinal Collins come in person to the Oratory. His schedule does not allow him to do ordinations other than those for his own Archdiocese, but he graciously makes an exception for us! I hope that you were able to watch, either in person on our YouTube channel. It has been a blessing to see the vocations we have been watching and nurturing for years arrive at this joyful moment. We are delighted to have them with us, now and for many years to come—we Oratorians do not get transferred; God willing, we are here at the Toronto Oratory for the rest of our lives. Please keep Fathers Alexander and Christopher in your prayers as they settle into their priestly lives!

#### *The New Seminary Building*

Anyone involved in a major construction project can testify that it demands planning, perseverance, and impressive amounts of improvisation. Such a project in the middle of a world-wide pandemic is a challenge of a different order! All of us have borne these challenges in some way or another, but an enormous part of the burden fell on Fr Martin Hilbert, who supervised the project heroically. We are extremely grateful for his dedication and expertise. Supply chains were disrupted, the number of workers on site was limited, and City Hall's permit department moved at glacial speeds—not to mention real construction problems and a labour dispute thrown in. Somehow, these obstacles were no match for God's providence and many, many prayers! The building had been made possible by the spiritual and financial support you have offered us, and that support continues. Seminarians have moved into the building, teaching is underway in the new classrooms and is transmitted to the United States, the United Kingdom, and France using the technologies we were able to purchase as a result of our 2020 Annual Appeal. The number of seminarians in residence was reduced because of travel restrictions, but those are gradually

being lifted. We hope to have an official and public blessing of the building in the summer, when landscaping and some final masonry work is complete. We'll send details about that as they become clearer. We would love for you to see it in person.

#### *Apostolic Visitation*

Each Oratory of Saint Philip Neri is independent. We do not have a centralized government with provincials and a superior-general; each Oratory is individually responsible to the Holy See. But every five or six years the Oratories worldwide receive a representative of the Holy See, called the Apostolic Visitor, whom Oratorians are permitted to select from among their own number. The current Apostolic Visitor is Fr Marco Guillén, a Toronto Oratorian. So Fr Marco's time is spent travelling around the



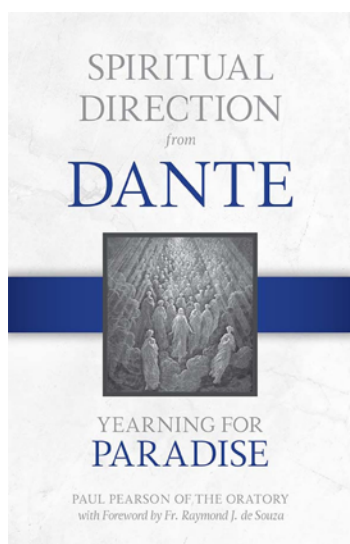


world conducting visitations—as much, at least, as current travel restrictions will allow. As is customary, however, for his own house the Visitor delegates his task to another, and for the recent visitation of the Toronto Oratory Fr Marco chose as his delegate Monsignor Michael Palud, Provost of the Port Antonio Oratory in Jamaica. He was with us from 25 February until 3 March, meeting with each of the members, reviewing our records, and speaking with our staff, our students, and some of our parishioners. We are very grateful for his kindness—and for the opportunity to reflect on the gift of our life here at the Oratory. Events like this allow us to stop and think, and that is a blessing.

*Dante*

On 29 March, the final instalment of the commentary on Dante's *Divine Comedy* will be officially released. The three-volume series is called *Spiritual Direction from Dante* (published by TAN Books, Saint Benedict's Press) and focuses on the spiritual lessons to be drawn from Dante's masterpiece. The first volume, *Avoiding the Inferno*, came out in 2019; *Ascending Mount Purgatory* appeared in 2020, and now finally *Yearning for Paradise* is available. Because of restric-

tions on large gatherings, we were not able to have a book launch for the Purgatory volume, so we hope soon to have an in-person event (I look forward to no longer having to specify that!) launching both *Ascending Mount Purgatory* and *Yearning for Paradise*. An announcement of the event will be made through the Oratory's



email list. If you are not on that list and would like to receive regular updates, just send an email to [mail@oratory-toronto.org](mailto:mail@oratory-toronto.org).

### *The Oratory Summer School*

For thirty three years now the Toronto Oratory has provided a two-week Summer School in Theology specifically intended for lay people. As in past years, the foundation for this year's Summer School will be laid in the first week with an **Introductory Survey of the Catechism of the Catholic Church**. Each year we examine crucial topics discussed in the Catechism. The lectures are very well suited to anyone involved in teaching catechism classes or RCIA, school teachers, or to someone who wants to come to a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the faith. The second week treats a different topic each year, to allow those from past years to come back and spend time enriching their understanding and appreciation of our faith. This year is special for us here at the Oratory as we celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the canonization of the "Five Saints" on March 12<sup>th</sup>—Saints Philip Neri, Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, Teresa of Avila, and Isidore the Farmer. An amazing group of saints! The anniversary gives us the opportunity to reflect on the idea of sanctity, the powerful example that the saints give us, and how saints are declared. Saint Philip was convinced that Catholics should give more attention to lives of the saints and their writings—by reading books that begin with the letter "S", like Saint Augustine, Saint Benedict, etc. And so our Second Session this year is entitled **BOOKS (AND PEOPLE) THAT BEGIN WITH S**. The course is in person and is also available online. Since we open the Seminary Residence for people from out of town, it is also a wonderful opportunity to spend time here, and for us to get to know you better. If you would be interested, you can register on our website at [oratory-toronto.org/summer-school/](http://oratory-toronto.org/summer-school/) or directly at Eventbrite [torontooratory.eventbrite.ca](https://torontooratory.eventbrite.ca) 🌿