



The Oratory of Saint Philip Neri



*St Philip, Vessel of the Holy Spirit,
shows himself in diverse ways*

THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS have felt like a time of holding on, working quietly, and waiting for better times. Now the hard work, sacrifices, and generosity of this challenging period are certainly bearing fruit. We have been encouraged by the possibility of life in the parishes and at the Oratory returning to ever-greater normalcy. The community is growing, our facilities are almost ready for a new generation of seminarians and laypeople, and many new initiatives have made us feel a rekindling of the spiritual life and the joy of gathering together. We are very grateful for these signs of God's blessings—and for your

assistance, both financial and spiritual, that has been instrumental in making all of this possible.

Renovatio: the New Seminary Building

The building project that has consumed so many resources and so much attention and energy is approaching completion. (I am sure you will be happy to hear the end of it, too!) Finishing touches are being applied inside the new building and in the newly renovated old building, and I can hear landscapers at work as I write (ah, the music of construction

*Br Bernard, and
Fr Martin — action
and contemplation*



equipment). The new facility will house twenty-four residential seminarians, and many more students in the Toronto area who will attend classes. There are four state-of-the-art teaching rooms, with cameras, microphones, and smart-boards, to allow courses to be taken by students from around the world. What we were forced to do during the lockdowns has turned into something that allows us to teach enlarged numbers of seminarians. This coming year, students from the United States, England, and Wales will join us online.

It is an immense relief to see the finish line of the building project, and we feel very blessed to have this new facility with which to serve the Church through training seminarians and teaching laypeople. At the moment, thirty-nine seminarians are registered for the fall! We have already used the facilities for our Summer School and various other talks and gatherings.

The Solemn Blessing

We will mark the completion of the building, and ask for God's continued blessings upon our work, in a special way on October 1. The Apostolic Nuncio to Canada, Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, has graciously agreed to come to Toronto to bless our new building. All are welcome to attend the blessing and will have an opportunity to tour the facilities and meet our students. We are grateful to have the opportunity to gather together so many people who have assisted us in this venture. We hope that as many of you as possible will be able to be with us in person to see the completion of the work you have supported so generously.

The Growing Oratorian Community

Our last newsletter had the joy of recounting the ordinations of our two most recent priests—Alexander Griffiths and Christopher Huynh. Their first months of priestly life have been filled with celebrations with the many groups of people who have had a share in fostering their vocations. They have been a great assistance already in our busy schedule of masses and confessions, but this fall each will begin a more individual ministry. Fr Alexander will be teaching at a private Catholic high school, and Fr Christopher will be doing sacramental chaplaincy at a local hospital. May God continue to bless them in their vocations and support them in their new roles.

August 14th was a particularly joyful day for the community. Logan Weir was clothed as Brother Bernard and began his life with us as an Oratorian. Brother Bernard is originally from Strathmore, Alberta, but came to Ontario to study at Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom College. His studies then took him to Christendom College and the Catholic University of America, where he pursued studies in philosophy. He still needs to complete his doctoral dissertation over the next few years— something to keep in your prayers. We are delighted to welcome him as part of the community. Please continue to pray for vocations to the Oratory. We have truly been blessed, but we can do even more with more Oratorians! God's work is definitely labour intensive.

The 400th Anniversary of Saint Philip's Canonization

22 March 1622 was a great day in the history of the Church, the day of the "Five Saints." Until this time, canonizations were celebrated of individual saints, but the challenges of the Reformation led the Church to innovate. The Church had already scheduled the canonization of Saint Isidore the Farmer, but it decided to add to the celebration four great heroes of the Counter-Reformation—Saints Philip, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius of Loyola, and Francis Xavier—an amazing collection of holiness. (Did you know that major relics of Saint Philip and Saint Ignatius are in the altar of Holy Family Church?) The anniversary

was celebrated in a special way in Rome. Fr Marco Guillén, who is serving as Apostolic Visitor, represented the worldwide Oratory at these celebrations. Back here in Toronto, the anniversary gave us the opportunity to reflect on the great gift we have been given by the life and example of Saint Philip and his continual intercession for us. But it also drew our attention to the wonder of the Communion of Saints. We do not live our Catholic lives in dreary isolation—we are surrounded by a great "cloud of witnesses." These reflections inspired many of our activities this year.

The Oratory Summer School

Each year the Toronto Oratory provides a two-week Theology Summer School specifically intended for lay people. This summer was our thirty-third. The first session, as is always the case, was a study of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The second week, whose topic changes each year, was inspired by 1622. The anniversary gave 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



*The relics of St Philip and St Francis Xavier
— saints reunited uniquely*

Augustine, Saint Benedict, etc. It turned out to be a particularly rewarding session. Almost a hundred people took part in the classes over the two weeks: the majority were with us in person, but a significant number attended the classes online. In the first week, we were able to use the new seminary classroom—a beautiful setting for teaching—and the seminary courtyard for lunch! The second week we needed to move to the parish hall. There were simply too many people for the seminary rooms to accommodate: a very nice problem to have!

An Evening of the Arts: Saint Philip's Birthday Party

On 22 July, in honour of Saint Philip's birthday, we hosted an Evening of the Arts. The theme was art inspired by Saint Philip. In his own day, Philip was a great patron and supporter of the arts. For example, he drew to himself an amazing assortment of musicians and composers, including such great names as Palestrina and Victoria. The association between Philip and the arts was so strong that it led some historians of music to suggest that oratorios (large religious-themed musical works, like Handel's *Messiah*) were named after the Oratory. Parishioners, friends, and members of the Oratorian community contributed paintings, drawings, photography, various art installations, poetry, and music. There was even a play written for the occasion by one of our

In spite of himself, St Philip draws the crowds



Life imitates Art

talented parishioners. The play, set in the Catacombs, made reference to that dramatic moment in Philip's life when he was deciding whether to serve as a missionary in India (following the inspiring accounts he had read from Saint Francis Xavier). A holy priest, guided by a vision, told Philip that "Rome is to be your Indies." Both the author and the cast produced a very moving and entertaining conclusion to the evening. Before leaving, however, we joined together in the church, as Saint Philip surely would have done, for a very beautiful exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction. Like Saint Philip, we were blessed to have musicians to make the liturgical end of the evening a true highlight. And why shouldn't our worship be a highlight?

We are extremely grateful to God and to all of you for making these works, large and small, possible. Please pray for us—and come and see what your support has accomplished! 