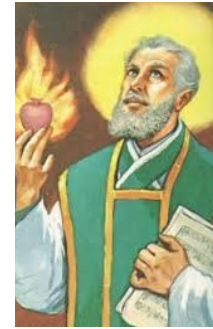




## Saint of the Month: Heaven's Heroes



**Saint Philip Neri**  
**July 21, 1515 — May 26, 1595**

**Goal:** To provide a lesson for children about a saint or saints who exemplify a deep relationship with God and the ability to share it with others

**Materials Needed:** This lesson plan, accompanying story, and any necessary materials for follow-up activities

### Objectives:

1. To assist children in developing the understanding that all of God's people are called to a life of holiness
2. To help children respond appropriately to the question: What is a saint?  
One who:
  - is proclaimed by the Church, after their death, to have lived a life of holiness
  - teaches others about Jesus by their example
  - lives like Jesus
3. To introduce one of our Church's saints, Saint Philip Neri, telling as much of the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level
4. To learn that Philip was a saint because he lived in a way that respected the Gospel of Jesus
5. To learn that we are called by God to share the Gospel with our lives
6. To help the children develop listening skills

### Procedure:

1. Prepare the children to listen to Saint Philip Neri's story
2. Read, or have read, the attached story of Saint Philip Neri. Elaborate or abbreviate as necessary for time constraints or age level of listeners
3. Use the follow-up questions
4. Present follow-up activity below. (optional) Any follow-up activity can be substituted.

### Saint Philip Neri

Philip Neri was born on July 21, 1515 to Francesco di Neri, a lawyer, and his wife Lucrezia da Mosciano. He was educated by the friars at San Marco, a famous Dominican monastery in Florence, Italy.

From an early age, his big personality, sense of humor and spontaneity was evident to all. He would tell jokes and play harmless tricks on his friends and family. One day he saw a donkey carrying fruit to the market and jumped on its back. The donkey in its surprise, lost its footing and fell down a flight of stairs, taking Philip with him. Luckily they were both unhurt.

At the age of 18, because of financial troubles, Philip left Florence to work with his uncle, a successful merchant, in San Germano. During this time Philip found a favorite place to pray in the foothills of the mountains. As he strengthened his relationship with God, Philip became less interested in the comfortable of life being a merchant. Eventually, Philip bid his uncle farewell and moved to Rome in 1533. Upon arrival in Rome, Philip studied philosophy and theology for three years under the Augustinians, a religious order that follows the teachings of Saint Augustine of Hippo. The order's charism followed their founder's instructions to be "of one mind and heart on their way towards God". Although he left the Augustinian seminary before ordination, Philip adopted that ideal as his mission in life—to follow his path towards holiness and to serve others along their own paths.

Philip spent the next seventeen years being a missionary of God in Rome as a lay person. He visited the sick and troubled who sought spiritual healing and companionship. He would often use his sense of humor to tell people jokes and make them smile. His two favorite books, which he often read to shut-ins, were the New Testament and a collection of jokes.

In 1548, Philip, together with his priest confessor, Persiano Rossa, founded the Confraternity of the Most Holy Trinity of Pilgrims and Convalescents to feed and shelter poor pilgrims who traveled for days on foot to visit Rome especially during jubilee years. The Confraternity also took care of poor patients who were released from local hospitals but were still too weak to work and provide for themselves and their families.

Energized by helping others and at the urging of his priest confessor, Philip was ordained a priest in 1551. He contemplated going to India to continue his mission work there, but felt the need to continue to serve the poor of Rome.

Because Philip's own spiritual life had grown greatly from his frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, he devoted much of his time to hearing confessions. He had a knack for reaching people through gentleness and humor. While listening to confessions, Philip realized people needed more spiritual guidance than he could provide during their short visits. He encouraged them to come weekly to discuss spiritual readings and pray with him. The number of men attending these meetings grew quickly. Philip began taking them on excursions to other churches with music and a picnic along the way. In 1553, Philip started the tradition of making a one-day pilgrimage to seven churches in Rome, starting at Saint Peter's Basilica and ending at Saint Mary Major. Known as The Seven Churches Walk, this pilgrimage continues to this day, usually on the Wednesday of Holy Week. Many people around the world visit seven local churches in their area.

Philip believed the disposition of a cheerful Christian was not only more likely to attract others to the faith but also a clearer way to holiness. He said, "*A joyful heart is more easily made perfect than a downcast one.*"

For all of Philip's lighthearted humor, he was very serious about prayer, spending hours a day with God. When people would ask for guidance of the correct way to pray, Philip would reply, "Be humble and obedient and the Holy Spirit will teach you."

Philip died on May 26, 1595 after a long illness at the age of eighty years.

He is known as the Apostle of Rome.

***Pray: Saint Philip Neri, through prayer and confession, you found your own missionary path. Help me to listen to God's plan for me as you did. May I remember that joyful service to others is part of the path to holiness. Amen.***

**Follow-up Questions:** (add, omit, re-word as appropriate for your grade level)

1. Like Saint Philip Neri, you don't have to travel to faraway countries to be a missionary. What are some ways you can be a missionary in your own city as he was? What are some ways you can be a missionary in your parish, school, and home?
2. Saint Philip Neri was known to be a happy jokester. Does it surprise you that someone like that can also be a prayerful saint? Why or why not?

**Follow-up Activities:**

***All students:***

1. The Seven Churches Walk in Rome covers a distance of 22.5 kilometers or 13.98 miles. Challenge each class to raise either \$22.50 or \$13.98 for the missions. Donations will help children in the missions learn more about the sacraments, especially Reconciliation.
2. Saint Philip Neri was devoted to a life of prayer. During May, the month of the Rosary sacrifice some personal time—give up playing your favorite game, reading a book, recess time—and sit and say a decade of the World Mission Rosary every day.
3. After developing a deeper relationship with God through prayer, Saint Philip Neri realized material goods and money were not the most important thing in life. This month, sacrifice some money you may be saving for a new game or clothes and put it in your Mite Box. Say a prayer for children who don't have new clothes or fancy games.

***Older students:***

1. Use Google maps to find out what the closest six churches are to yours and visit them along with your own church. Also, organize a Seven Churches pilgrimage on a Saturday—ask adults to drive you. Pray a decade of the World Mission Rosary at each church. Pray for children in the missions who do not live near any church. Take pictures of each church and make a presentation to your fellow students about the differences or similarities that you see.