

A Visit from St. Philip Neri: A Heavenly Counseling Session

Setting: A small, dimly lit apartment where a Catholic, named Michael, sits on his couch, staring at the floor. He sighs deeply, burdened by guilt and sorrow over his sins. Suddenly, the room is filled with an inexplicable light, and a joyful presence enters.

St. Philip Neri: *[Appearing in a burst of light, stretching and cracking his knuckles]* Whew! Heaven's a wonderful place, but I tell you, teleporting to Earth never gets easier. Oh, Michael, my dear friend, you look like you just swallowed a lemon!

Michael: *[Startled]* Aaaaah! Who—who are you?!

St. Philip Neri: *[Grinning]* Well, if I had a nickel for every time someone asked me that, I could build a cathedral! I'm Philip Neri, patron saint of joy. And judging by your face, you need a healthy dose of it!

Michael: *[Groans]* A saint? *Great.* Just what I need—someone to tell me how much worse I am.

St. Philip Neri: *[Laughs]* Oh no, no, no. That's not my style. You see, if God called only perfect people, heaven would be emptier than a confessional at a barbecue festival! Now tell me, why the long face?

Michael: *[Sighs]* I've sinned. A lot. Like, "probably-going-to-get-a-personal-invitation-from-hell" a lot. I keep failing, over and over. I feel like such a hypocrite. I tell myself I'll change, but then—BAM—I mess up again. I'm a rotten tree, bearing rotten fruit. Jesus said, "A good tree does not bear bad fruit," right? *[Luke 6:43]* Well, that means I must be a bad tree.

St. Philip Neri: *[Nods knowingly]* Ah, so that's what's been rattling around in your head. First off, let's get something straight: You are not a bad tree. You are a tree in need of pruning! *[Psalm 92:13-14]* says: "They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age, they are ever full of sap and green." Translation: Even old, stubborn trees can be full of life if they stay rooted in God!

Michael: *[Still skeptical]* But what if my sins are just too much? What if God is sick of forgiving me?

St. Philip Neri: *[Gasps in mock horror]* Michael! How dare you underestimate God's mercy! That's like saying the ocean is too small to hold your teardrop. Listen, let's consult our old friend, St. Paul. *[1 Corinthians 15:54-57]* says: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" You see, sin and death have been defeated! You're fighting a battle that's already been won!

Michael: *[Still struggling]* That sounds nice, but I still feel useless. I mean, how can I be an example of Christ when I keep falling?

St. Philip Neri: *[Chuckles]* Michael, do you know how many times I fell into foolishness? Once, I was so distracted by a joke that I walked straight into a well! Another time, I accidentally set my beard on fire. I was constantly making mistakes. But you know what? I loved Jesus, and He used me anyway! The same goes for you.

Michael: *[Hesitant]* But my heart feels so weighed down.

St. Philip Neri: *[Sits beside him]* Then let's talk about purifying that heart. Ever heard of a sieve?

Michael: A sieve?

St. Philip Neri: Yes! Sirach [27:4] says, “When a sieve is shaken, the refuse appears; so do a man’s faults when he speaks.” Imagine your heart is a sieve. God shakes it, and all the bad stuff—pride, anger, selfishness—rises to the surface. Not to shame you, but to heal you. Every time you see your sin, instead of despairing, say, “Ah! Another piece of dirt God wants to clean!”

Michael: [*Pauses, considering*] So... I should see my failures as proof that God is still working on me?

St. Philip Neri: [*Nods*] Exactly! And let’s be honest—if you were perfect, you’d be insufferable! You’d be walking around saying, “Look at me! Holier than a Swiss cheese!” But because you struggle, you can understand others who struggle. That makes you an even better witness of Christ’s mercy!

Michael: [*Smiles slightly*] I never thought about it like that.

St. Philip Neri: [*Taps Michael’s shoulder*] Good! Now let’s deal with this joy deficiency. Do you know that God delights in you?

Michael: [*Skeptical*] I think He just tolerates me.

St. Philip Neri: [*Shaking his head*] Nonsense! [*Psalm 92:4*] says, “For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.” You are the work of His hands! If you think He only tolerates you, you haven’t met the real God—He is your biggest fan!

Michael: [*Chuckles*] Okay, I’ll admit, that’s a nice thought.

St. Philip Neri: [*Jumps up*] Excellent! Then let’s put this into practice. First step: Go to confession.

Michael: [*Groans*] Do I have to?

St. Philip Neri: [*Grinning*] Do birds fly? Do fish swim? Yes, Michael, you have to! It’s not a punishment—it’s a liberation! Think of it as a divine spa treatment for your soul.

Michael: [*Sighs*] Fine. But what if I mess up again?

St. Philip Neri: [*Winks*] Then you go back! As often as it takes. Even if you have to confess the same sin a thousand times, God will never say, “Oh no, not you again!” His mercy is infinite!

Michael: [*Finally smiling*] Alright. I’ll go.

St. Philip Neri: [*Claps hands*] Wonderful! Now, before I go, one last piece of advice—laugh more! I tell you, the devil hates laughter. It’s a sign of hope, and hope drives him mad!

Michael: [*Grinning*] Thanks, St. Philip. I think I needed this.

St. Philip Neri: [*Walking toward the light*] Any time, my friend! And remember—holiness isn’t about never falling; it’s about always getting up. Oh, and try not to set your beard on fire. I learned that the hard way!

[*With that, St. Philip Neri disappears, leaving Michael with a renewed heart, a lighter spirit, and a smirk on his face.*]

