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of prayer with

SAINT PHILIP NERI

15 days

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The Saint of Joy

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How to Use This Book

*I*t is a great privilege for me to bring this admirable book from Fr. Audrain to an English-speaking audience. He has provided us with a wonderful introduction to a saint who witnesses as well as any other to the joy associated with a life lived in Christ. Several excellent biographies of St. Philip Neri exist, most of which are cited frequently by Fr. Audrain, but those are much longer and many readers will find them intimidating or too big of a commitment to be the basis for a first encounter with St. Philip. Fr. Audrain has made the valuable contribution of a book that is rich and thorough in its own way, while still concise and accessible to the newcomer. He describes the colorful events of St. Philip's life and their significance without allowing himself to be distracted by details that are interesting and important from certain perspectives but not directly related to the main purpose of this book, which is the inspiration of prayer and, as Fr. Audrain said to me, "to make St. Philip better known and loved." Fr. Audrain provides us with a biography in the

form of a fifteen-day retreat with a great saint. These fifteen days are to be days of prayer, and St. Philip would not have it any other way. The intention here is to inspire in us the desire to pray with Philip and to imitate his openness to the Spirit of God.

How is one to do that? How is one to pray and open himself to God? Prayer is difficult. St. John Henry Newman, a great son of St. Philip, said so. Perhaps that is already an encouragement. If so great a saint as Cardinal Newman confessed to the difficulty of prayer, then we are not alone when we find it hard. The fact of the matter is that many saints, including the very greatest, experienced difficulties in prayer. St. John of the Cross describes these in careful detail. As we will see in the pages to follow, St. Philip experienced challenges in prayer, though not the usual sort. We can be sure, then, that the obstacles we encounter in prayer do not mean that we are doing something wrong or that prayer is somehow not for us. Someone once told me regarding physical exercise, "Getting out the door is the hardest part." In other words, the hardest part is simply to begin. The older I get, the less sure I am of the truth of that advice, but it is certainly true of prayer. The hardest part is simply getting started. Beginning something difficult is doubly hard when the journey ahead is lonely, which is why this book is so valuable. We are invited to make a beginning and go our way in the company of a joyful saint, one