

BLESSED ANTHONY GRASSI, C.O.

1592-1671; BEATIFIED IN 1900 BY POPE LEO XIII; FEAST DAY: DECEMBER 15



Antonio Grassi was born in 1592 in Fermo, on the Adriatic coast of Italy, home to one of the oldest Congregations of the Oratory, which was founded in 1586. Good natured, intelligent, and pious, Antonio's childhood was simple and austere, and he was educated by the Fathers of the Oratory. After a long illness and the death of his father when he was ten years old, Antonio began spiritual direction under Father Ricci, who had known St. Philip personally. Antonio entered the Fermo Oratory shortly before his 17th birthday, and he was ordained in 1617 at age 25. During his studies for priesthood, he is said to have acquired an encyclopedic knowledge of Scripture, the Church Fathers, and Aquinas.

Father Antonio's devotion to the Blessed Mother led to a most extraordinary experience when in 1621, while praying at the shrine of the Holy House in Loreto, he was struck by lightning. While his clothes were burned and he was knocked unconscious, he was miraculously healed. This experience had a profound effect on the young priest, who dedicated himself all the more to the will of God.

On pilgrimage in Rome during the Holy Year of 1625, Father Antonio visited the important sites of St. Philip and learned much about him from Father Consolini. This knowledge served him well when he was elected provost of the Fermo Oratory, a position he held for 36 years, from 1635 until his death.

Father Antonio exemplified the Oratorian spirit of humility. He was not known for doing anything extraordinary; he was not a missionary, mystic or ascetic. He rarely left the small city where he had been born and raised. He did not need to go elsewhere, for he was content to serve God quietly in the everyday tasks that, when done well, bring about sanctification. He is known to have placed great importance on adherence to the few rules of the Oratory which keep its members close to the spirit of St. Philip.

As a priest, Father Antonio was renowned as a confessor and known as the "priest of the poor" for his extraordinary charity. He was particularly adept at resolving disputes among rivals, earning the moniker "angel of peace". And he was especially known for his faithfulness in visiting the sick and the dying.

During his own long final illness in 1671, Father Antonio is said to have repeatedly told his confreres, "What a beautiful thing it is to die as sons of St. Philip." He was beatified by Pope Leo XIII during the Holy Year of 1900, the third Oratorian to be so honored.