



PHILIP,  
GO TO  
MY SERVANTS

*On the cover:*

During the Easter week of 1254, Philip listening to the passage from the Acts of the Apostles:

“Philip, go up and join that chariot” (Acts 8:29), he has a vision in which he is invited to ride in the Mother’s chariot, understanding that this chariot is the Order of the Servants of Mary.

(Innsbruck, St. Joseph’s Priory of the Servants of Mary;

Photo: Reinhold Sigl).

*Back cover:*

Terracotta bust, probably the oldest portrait of Saint Philip.

(Florence, SS. Annunziata Priory of the Servants of Mary

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## PHILIP, GO TO MY SERVANTS

*Letter from the Prior General fra Gottfried M. Wolff  
to the Family of brothers and sisters Servants of Mary  
on the occasion of the 350th anniversary  
of the canonization of Saint Philip Benizi of Florence*

### INTRODUCTION

**E**xactly 350 years ago, on 12 April 1671, Pope Clement X raised to the honour of the altars Philip Benizi of Florence (1233-1285), first friar of the Order of the Servants of Mary to receive this solemn recognition, proposing him as a model to the Order and the Church.

I want this great event not to go by unnoticed by us, the Servants of Mary of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed, I hope it can be a providential occasion to call us back to ever greater fidelity to our charism and to a fruitful reflection on holiness in our Order and in our time.

Taking a lead from the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*<sup>1</sup>, whose “humble goal is to make the call to holiness resonate once again, trying to embody it in the current context, with its risks, challenges and opportunities” (no. 2), I thought of addressing a Letter to all the Servants of Mary across the world to exhort each of us to live the call to holiness in accordance with our Servite charism.

My reflection unfolds in two parts: a historical reference to the memory of the long journey that led to the canonization of our first saint, and an attempt to deepen some aspects that characterize the holiness of our great Philip, allowing us to be a significant presence in the Church and in the world of today.

In this research we will be accompanied by our ancient *Legendæ*<sup>2</sup> and some liturgical texts that the Order has produced since the Second Vatican Council<sup>3</sup>.

## I. THE BRIGHT LAMP PREPARED BY GOD (Lo 55)

*12 April 1671 The canonization*

**1** On 29 April 1670, after a conclave that lasted four months and celebrated under the severe pressure of the European powers, the eighty-year-old Cardinal Emilio Altieri was elected Pope, choosing the name of Pope Clement X.

Less than a year after his election, on 12 April 1671 (the second Sunday after Easter) the Pope raised five religious to the honour of the altars - in what was the only canonization of his six-year pontificate: Gaetano Thiene (1480 -1547), founder of the Theatines; Francesco Borgia (1510-1572), Duke of Gandia and general provost of the Society of Jesus; Luigi Bertrand (1526-1581), Dominican, apostle of Colombia; Rose of Lima (1586-1617), Dominican Tertiary, first South American saint and Philip Benizi from Florence.

While the other saints had had a fairly short journey to reach pontifical recognition, Philip's canonization came al-

most four centuries after his death, even though the Order of the Servants of Mary always revered him as a saint.

**2** In fact Philip is the eminent figure in the first decades of the history of the Servants of Mary and - together with the humble and precious presence of the Seven Founders of the Order, canonized in 1888 - embodies the charismatic foundation of the Order, so much so that the *Legenda de Origine Ordinis Servorum beatæ Virginis Mariæ* (the oldest narrative text on the origins) was conceived as a great introduction to a *Legenda* of Blessed Philip.

Born in Florence in 1233, Philip is among the first young people who joined the Seven Florentine merchants in the first years of the new experience called “Servants of Mary”: at that time there were only four communities, all in central Italy.

The story of the new “community of fraternal souls” and that of Philip go hand in hand and while the small Order finds sympathy in the Church<sup>4</sup>, the young Philip climbs “aboard the golden chariot” in 1254, according to his desire, as a lay brother. Later, an apparently casual circumstance made his brothers discover his religious and cultural depth so he was initiated into the priesthood, received before 1260.

The esteem towards Philip within the young Order - in the meantime recognized by Pope Alexander IV with the bull *Deo grata* of 23 March 1256 - grew rapidly and in the Chapter of Florence in 1267 he was elected Prior General, a position renewed every year until his death. In this office, his action in the was providential in the period following the Second Council of Lyons, which had endangered the exist-

ence of the Servants of Mary. On 22 August 1285 in Todi, while the friars were praying, Philip “went to heaven” (LP 23).

### *A long journey*

**3** While still alive, Philip was considered a “saint” by the Servants of Mary, as an economic register of the Florentine Priory of Santa Maria di Cafaggio movingly testifies, which notes: “MCCLXXXV die VIII mensis mai. Expense facte pro nepte *sancti patri nostri prioris generalis...*”<sup>5</sup>.

On 10 June 1317, Philip’s body was transferred from the common grave of the friars to a suitable place. The Prior General fra Peter of Todi (1314-1344) was present. He witnessed miraculous events after which he decided to turn his hand to writing a *legenda* that would preserve the memory of the “blessed men” (LO 3) and in particular of Philip, “the first model to be presented to the Order” (LO 4).

At least from 21 August 1327 the Municipality of Todi decided to offer two wax “torticios” “*ad honorem et reverentiam beati Filippi*”. This is the first certain testimony of public devotion<sup>6</sup>.

A splendid testimony of the cult given to Philip is the famous fresco in the choir of the existing church of San Francesco in Todi, which until 1599 was most likely the ancient chapter place of the friars Servants of Mary. The work is dated 1346. In its allegorical representation, the souls in white tunics come out of purgatory and are welcomed by the Virgin Mary. But before arriving in heaven, where St. Peter welcomes them, they meet Philip (with the rays of the blessed) who accompanies them into the presence of St. Peter with a gesture that is both sweet and almost maternal.

Not long after the transfer of 1317 there was an attempt to kidnap the remains of the holy friar by a group of Florentines: according to tradition, the attack was thwarted by the screams of the children of Todi.

Towards the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century there was a resumption of attempts to obtain the approval of the cult of Philip through three initiatives: the sending of an orator by the Municipality of Todi to the papal court; the hypothesis of celebrating a General Chapter in Todi to obtain the canonization of Philip; the project of building a chapel in his honour.

The General Chapter of Bologna of 1488 decided on the instruction of a process based on authentic miracles, to present the documentation in Rome, and the restoration of the priory of San Marco in Todi.

**4** January 24<sup>th</sup> 1516 marks a milestone in the process of recognizing the cult paid to Philip. On that day, the Florentine Pope Leo X, with the short *Exposuit nobis*, granted the Order the celebration of the feast of Philip with a double rite and its own office and Mass. The pontifical act, which was equivalent to beatification, was granted in place of a canonization, which it was not possible to conduct because of the serious situation being experienced by the Roman Church in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

A few years later a child was born in Florence, from the Neri family, who in honour of the new Florentine Blessed of the Servants of Mary was called Philip: this was the great Saint Philip Neri (1515-1595), a significant figure in the Church of the 16<sup>th</sup> and subsequent centuries.

Another attempt to kidnap the sacred body of Philip took place in 1570, thanks to an agreement between the

Grand Duke of Tuscany and the prior of the priory of Todi, who was originally from Florence. Following this episode, Philip's body was carried in procession through the streets of Todi, and placed under the new altar of the chapel dedicated to him.

**5** In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century there are two other transfers of his body: in 1579 and twenty years later. The second, from the church of San Marco to the new headquarters in Santa Maria delle Grazie, was very solemn.

On 23 August 1600 the chronicles of Todi tell of an apparition of the Virgin Mary to a farmer to whom the Virgin Mary recommended not to work that day because it was the feast of Blessed Philip.

In 1615 the Prior General Baldassarre Bolognetti wrote to the Order complaining about the neglect that surrounded the cause of Blessed Philip and urging a prompt recovery; at the same time even the authorities of Todi mobilized themselves for the same purpose.

Finally Paul V in 1617 authorised the introduction of the canonization process that took place at diocesan level in Florence and Todi. Not even all of this documentation was enough and we still had to wait almost fifty years.

Finally, on 12 January 1669, the Sacred Congregation of Rites decided to proceed with the examination of the miracles required for canonization and two weeks later Pope Clement IX gave his consent.

After the death of Pope Clement IX (9 December 1669) and the election of Pope Clement X, the Vicar General of the Order Giovanni Vincenzo Lucchesini obtained from the

pontiff that the Sacred Congregation of Rites should examine the case of Blessed Philip on 11 November 1670: in that meeting approval for canonization was granted.

### *Celebrations in the Order*

**6** The 12<sup>th</sup> April 1671 was a day of festival in the Order. The chronicles of the time record, in addition to the magnificent celebration in St. Peter's Basilica, expansive bells ringing throughout the Eternal City, with salvos of artillery and fireworks. About two hundred friars participated in the ceremony, including some from the two hermitages of Monte Senario and Monte Urbano.

All the priories of the Order honoured their first canonized saint, in particular Florence and Todi.

In the sanctuary of the Santissima Annunziata “highly selected music was performed in honour of the saint by eight choirs of singers”.

In Todi - where the body of the new saint is venerated - a solemn procession was held through the streets, while window decorations displayed a festive atmosphere in honour of the patron saint of the city<sup>7</sup>.

Following his canonization Philip became co-patron of Todi, Foligno (1675) and Mantua (1678) and principal patron of Città di Castello (1694).

Philip's canonization had a two-fold outcome: within the Order it relaunched the causes of canonization of the Seven Founders (Recognition of Cult 1725, canonization only in 1888), St Peregrine (1726) and St Juliana (1741); but it also constituted a significant vehicle for knowledge of the Order in the Church, especially in mission lands.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Philip's iconographic production probably reached "an all-time high, in the variety of motifs as well as in the quality of execution", in particular through the diffusion of multiple engravings.

A curious episode is linked to the date of 4 June 1724, the day of the coronation of Pope Benedict XIII. On that same day the Pope, with the constitution *Ratione congruit*, officially promulgated the canonization made by Pope Clement X, which had not been formalized with a written document.

The centenaries of the canonization were not celebrated in a particular way, neither in 1771 (there are no archival documents) nor in 1871 - understandably amid the historical events that were happening at that time, especially in Italy. Fifty years ago in 1971 there were some initiatives in Todi<sup>8</sup>. In general, it can be said that the anniversary of the saint's death was celebrated much more than the anniversary of his canonization.



*Picture pg. 11*

Philip wanting to hide his deep cultural background,  
does simple fraternal services such as working in the kitchen.  
(Innsbruck, St. Joseph's Priory of the Servants of Mary;  
Photo: Reinhold Sigl)

## II. WE ARE CHILDREN OF SAINTS (LPER 10)

7 In this letter of mine I would like to highlight three characteristics of the holiness of our great Saint Philip, which can be deduced from the main spiritual texts of our Order: his *vocation*, his role as a *New Moses* and the image of him as *Alter Christus*.

First of all, the singular importance of a piece of archive data to which I have already mentioned should not escape us. In addition to the text already indicated, dated 8 May 1285, in the same “Income and Expenditure Register” of the Florentine Servite priory there is a simple expression, “sancto Philippo” - annotated almost in passing: the text was not intended to be handed down to posterity being a working note. In my opinion it is an extremely eloquent testimony (albeit only from the editor of the register) of a reputation for holiness probably widespread and shared by many friars in the Order. This fact may arouse surprise and emotion, considering that Philip had only just died. It is truly surprising and symptomatic that in an economic register we can detect the first trace of the Florentine friar’s reputation for holiness, for a long time at the head of the Order and therefore obliged to make decisions that are not always popular. I think it can be said that the Order was *with* Philip, *with* his choices, *with* his lifestyle and *with* his way of embodying the charism of the Servants of Mary: and this in a period when Alexis, and perhaps not only him from among the Seven, was still alive.

**8** In the *Legenda de Origine*, Philip is indicated as a “model of authentic service” which is given by the Lord “so that the friars of the Order could learn in unity to serve their Lady worthily”<sup>10</sup>.

Let us then retrace some of the main moments in Philip’s life, through the texts that have nourished the devotion and desire for imitation of Servants of Mary towards their first saint for centuries.

## Vocation

### *God’s initiative through the Virgin*

**9** Every vocation is a mysterious, free and gracious initiative of God, which requires the free availability of the person.

The narration of Philip’s vocation according to the *legenda* entitled “*vulgar*” is truly significant: the young man “felt the desire [...] to serve the Most High Lord with all the strength of his heart” (LP 2) and to give substance to this delicate intuition throughout Lent he visited the churches of Fiesole, carrying out acts of penance and charity.

In this spiritual disposition, the Word of God takes on a surprising concreteness for Philip: “at the reading of the epistle, the servant of God Philip listened to that passage of Scripture which says: ‘Philip, come close and get on this chariot’” (LP 2)<sup>11</sup>. He takes these words as addressed to himself, so much so as to change his life. Of course, it is a literary genre that from Saint Antony the Abbot has become widespread in the *legendas* of the saints, yet it is an experience that still happens today by the intrinsic power that the Word of God has.

The Lord’s indication becomes more concrete through the initiative of the Virgin, who proves to be the true founder

of his Order: “the following night, the glorious Virgin appeared to the servant of God Philip, accompanied by a multitude of angels, and she said: ‘Philip, go to my Servants, that is, to the friars who are called Servants of Saint Mary’ ” (LP 5). How much we must recognize the action and the mysterious, maternal and real presence of the Virgin Mary in our vocation! And not only at its origin, but also in its development, as the Church declares in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*<sup>12</sup>. Basically, the reality indicated by John comes in the dramatic words of Jesus on the Cross: “Woman, behold your son”; “Behold your mother” (Jn 19:27), and with her autobiographical note: “And the disciple took her into his home”, something that happens in the life of every Christian and in particular of every brother and sister Servant of Mary.

### *The man's answer*

**10** Philip obeys the subtle directive of the Son and the Mother, and goes to her Servants. Philip's answer is, in fact, a request to understand - in order to embrace it - the indication of the Lord and of the Virgin Mary: “Philip woke up and, when it was day, he went to the priory of the Servants of Saint Mary, and when he arrived asked with great insistence for the prior” (LP 5). Always, in our relationship with God, our human initiative is expressed with a certain “passivity”, it is allowing God to lead.

### *The welcome given by Bonfilius*

**11** At this point, Philip's “*vulgar*” *legenda* offers an extremely precious indication for each of us, responsible for safeguard-

ing and supporting the vocations that the Lord and Our Lady continue to give to the Order. We are moved to show willingness to offer welcome and listening. This must be present in every Servite friar, nun, sister, layman and laywoman whenever they are approached by someone on matters of personal vocation.

This paternal and delicate availability, in the story of Philip, is embodied by Bonfiliius, one of the Seven, “a venerable father [...] then prior of the priory [...] who immediately came to the servant of God, and they spent a long while speaking of God” (LP 5). Bonfiliius addressed “blessed Philip with sweet words, putting before him the luminous joys of eternal life” (LP 6).

With such a welcome the young Philip spontaneously opens his heart to Bonfiliius “Philip, the man of God, spoke to him in detail about his vision, and in the end he asked to be allowed to live with the friars until his dying day. At these words the prior felt great joy and thanked God for having wanted to give the Order a person of such value” (LP 5).

### *The identity of the Servant of Mary*

**12** It is worth dwelling on the interpretation of the vision that Bonfiliius offers the young man, in particular on what is the oldest allegorical description of the Order in our possession. It is certainly the fruit of the reflection of the friars of the first generations and therefore precious for us today.

“He saw himself on a very deserted road, groping his way laboriously through briars, stones and mud and threatened by serpents. Philip cried out to God to come to his aid and,

when he had insisted for some time, he heard repeated the words of the Epistle, ‘Philip, go up and join that chariot’. At that he looked up to heaven and there before his eyes was a golden four-wheeled chariot upon which sat the Blessed Virgin, surrounded by a multitude of angels and saints and covering the chariot with a black mantle. The golden chariot was drawn by a lamb and a lion and round it circled a white dove. Eagerly blessed Philip tried to reach the chariot” (LP 3).

The ‘golden chariot, so beautifully laminated’ is ‘the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which can only move thanks to the four wheels, that is, the four Gospels, on which our life is founded’; ‘The animals that pull the chariot are a lamb and a lion’, symbol of the two main qualities of the Servant of Mary, ‘meekness [...] and fortitude’; finally, a climate of simplicity of life is described, indicated by the dove (cf. LP 6).

“And in such conversation they lingered for a long time”: how beautiful, when our conversations are made of such things, which we all desire but which sometimes avoid out of a false modesty!

**13** A second, precious description of the identity of the Servant of Mary is placed in the mouth of the young Philip, still a lay brother, when he meets two friars of the Order of Preachers together with Fra Vittore. Asked “what kind of life and what Order was the habit”, Philip replied with the words that constitute a wonderful synthesis of the consciousness matured in the Order in those first decades: “If you want to know of our origin, we are natives of this region; if you ask what condition we are in, they call us Servants of the glorious Virgin, of whose widowhood we wear the habit. We lead the

life instituted by the holy Apostles, and follow the rule of the saintly doctor Augustine” (LP 8). It will surely be a good thing, personally and in community, for us to reflect on these words that describe a real-life experience, and to try to live them in our own world today.

## New Moses

### *Legislator*

**14** I would like to emphasise an initial consideration which in my opinion allows us to compare the figure of Philip to that of the patriarch Moses.

The *Constitutiones antiquae*, which contain some parts that are uniquely characteristic of the Servants of Mary, were most likely drafted in a definitive way on the occasion of the General Chapter of Florence in 1289 or in any case before 1295. Philip had been dead for some years, but it is not difficult to hypothesize a strong influence of the holy Prior General in his seventeen years of service on the first legislative texts that regulated the life of the friars<sup>13</sup>.

In the second part of his generalate there are not a few and significant “declarations of lawyers in the Roman Curia and of doctors in laws and decrees, from February 1277”<sup>14</sup> following the well-known decision of the Second Council of Lyons (1274) to reduce the maximum number of mendicant orders and other recent institutes that still lacked pontifical approval<sup>15</sup>.

**15** At the same time - through decrees of general chapters presided over by Philip (from 1267 to 1285) - the law of the Order was also being consolidated, in which together with

the assumption of elements of other religious Orders (in particular those of monastic-mendicant inspiration), he was encoding original experiences.

In particular, at the beginning of the legislative text, we must not miss the placement of the chapter on “Acts of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary” (*De reverentiis b. Mariæ virgini exhibendis*): a “penitential commitment in service to Our Lady”<sup>16</sup> which is, and has remained a value and a specific characteristic of our religious family up to the present day<sup>17</sup> and which, in my opinion, constitutes one of the typical characteristics that we can offer to the Church and to the world today, through the liturgy, through study, and through high-quality promotion<sup>18</sup>.

**16** Another characteristic that could have been dictated by the holy friar and acquired as a norm in the Order is that of the family dimension, which can be found both through participation in the spiritual goods of the Order<sup>19</sup>, as well as in the beautiful chapter V of the *Constitutiones antiquæ* (*De suffragiis mortuorum*) “which constitute a special feature of the Servants with respect to the other legislative sources on which our Constitutions depend” in that suffrages are recommended not only for religious, but also for deceased parents and benefactors<sup>20</sup>. A splendid echo of this exquisite sensitivity, almost seven hundred years later, is our Ritual of the Servants of Mary for the Memory of Deceased Servants of Mary<sup>21</sup>.

### *Water and bread*

**17** It seems that I can point out another characteristic of this possible parallel between Moses and Philip through two known events that we remember on the occasion of the feast

of our saint<sup>22</sup>: the miracle of the loaves in Arezzo (cf. LP 14) and that of bread and water during the journey to the priories in Germany (cf. LP 18). Let us pause for a moment on each of the two prodigious episodes.

The first episode - caused by an objective situation created by a war - puts us in contact with the many situations that are sadly still being lived in our own days, such as what Pope Francis has defined “a third war being waged” in many battles “with crimes, massacres, destructions<sup>23</sup>”. The friars, says the *Legenda*, like all the people involved in the severe famine “barely managed to survive”.

The first concern of the holy Prior General was to be present with his friars, in fact “he tried to reach them as soon as possible, just like a good shepherd who rushes to help the abandoned ones”, and living their discomfort with them “blessed Philip comforted them as best he could”. Furthermore he implored the Virgin Mary, begging her “not to let her servants die of hunger, she who was a merciful mother”.

Then the miracle occurred, which we still remember on Philip’s feastday when we offer our people blessed bread and water: but the real miracle, perhaps, is the paternal presence that Philip offered to his destitute friars, also providing us with a precious indication for our life of fraternity.

The second episode, provoked by a lament from Philip’s travelling companion, closely recalls the experience of the people of Israel in the forty years of walking in the desert, to which the prayer of the holy friar refers: “Lord God the Father almighty, who you have given food to your people and you do not cease to nourish all creatures, feed this servant of yours, servant of your sweet Mother”. The reference to the Exodus story of God’s fidelity to his chosen people when they

are complaining is precious and significant for the troubles of our own times.

We should also recall two other episodes related to the water miraculously provided by Philip. The first is reported by Fra Paolo Attavanti in 1494 in his work *Paulina praedicabilis*<sup>24</sup>, where it is said that Philip, in order to escape the intention of the cardinals to elect him Pope, took refuge in a cave on Monte Amiata “where it is said that by virtue of his prayers discovered (or made to flow from the top of the mountain) thermal waters, still called today ‘Bagni di San Filippo’ ”<sup>25</sup>. The second episode collects a tradition - reported by Michele Poccianti in his *Chronicon rerum Ordinis Servorum* of 1567<sup>26</sup> - according to which on Monte Senario “God miraculously made water gush out of the nearby rock, to visibly attest to Philip that he had forgiven him those sins for which he was endlessly asking pardon<sup>27</sup>”.

### *Mount Nebo*

**18** There is another aspect of Philip’s life that shows him in some way similar to Moses, the great liberating patriarch of the people of Israel, worthy of our reflection.

As we know, Philip, in the service that the Lord and Our Lady required of him – to be father and lamp for the whole Order – guided the small group of Servants of Mary during a very difficult period. After the first years of development, the Second Council of Lyons (1274) put a stop to the birth and pontifical approval of new religious experiences, suspending - if not condemning to extinction - the Servants of Mary along with other orders born after the 4<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council of 1215.

Of course, the holy friar went and circulated around the offices of the papal Curia, probably relying on his knowledge – let us not forget that Philip was esteemed in curial circles as evidenced by both his assignment to preach the interdict in Forlì in 1282, and his possible election in the conclave of 1268-71 which is mentioned in the *Legenda de Origine Ordinis*<sup>28</sup>. He achieved some definite results, such as some favourable *counsels* by authoritative lawyers of the Curia and the granting of confirmations to individual priories by the popes.

But Philip - and this is the most interesting aspect from my point of view - ends his earthly life on 22 August 1285 without having certainty of the pontifical approval of the Order. This will only arrive on 11 February 1304 with the Bull *Dum levamus* of Pope Benedict XI.

On the other hand, this is the situation in which the friars of those first generations lived. Despite the climate of serious uncertainty, they did their utmost to obtain works of art from the greatest painters of the time (Duccio, Cimabue, Coppo di Marcovaldo) adorning altars in their churches, and thus concretely affirming their trust in divine Providence.

What a witness of authentic hope is transmitted to us by our fathers. They hold our hand even in our difficult “times of change” in our world and also in our Church, as Pope Francis reminds us!



*Picture pg. 23*

Philip gives his shirt to a leper.

The latter wears it and is healed.

(Innsbruck, St. Joseph's Priory of the Servants of Mary;

Photo: Reinhold Sigl)

### *Alter Christus*

**19** A careful reading of Philip's action during his generalate, as far as it is possible to deduce from the documents of the first century of the Order's life, allows us to detect some very interesting lines of his being Prior General. We see how that he is effectively authoritative, which we might define as acting "with authority" (Mk 1:22). In this way he touches the hearts of restless young people. He gives welcome to young people who knock on the door of the priories, remembering the welcome he himself had experienced in his meeting with Bonfilius. All this was lived in a climate that - to use a phrase from the *Legenda de Origine Ordinis* - could be described as "friendship of charity" (LO 29).

This attitude created around Philip - defined as "a shining lamp of divine light" (LO 9) - what we might call "a crown of saints" or the awareness - expressed exactly by Philip - of being "sons of saints"<sup>29</sup>.

### *Authority as closeness and service*

**20** Of Philip's predecessors we have documented information only about Bonfilius, who had welcomed Philip into the Order and explained to the young man the vision he had (cf. LO 6). With Philip, therefore, we can speak of the first description of the service of authority among the Servites, of which it is worth highlighting some aspects that are also valid for those of us who are called to such an office and service.

From the *Legenda* subtitled "*vulgata*" we can highlight how he behaves "not as a general, but as a simple friar" (LP 13); that he tries to reach the friars as quickly as possible by making himself present when they are in difficult situations, comforting

them “as he could” (LP 14). He was one who interceded with the Lord (cf. LP 18) and the Virgin for her friars (cf. LP 14).

The *Legenda* entitled “of Sheffield” also describes his propensity to make himself present in the communities where “he showed himself not as the father of the Order, but as a servant of all” (LSh 7) and his extreme humility, which drew others to imitation<sup>30</sup>. “The man of God, arriving in a priory that he was to visit, devoutly knelt before the altar and first made the act of due reverence. Then, returning to his place, he severely ordered the friars not to tell the seculars that he was general. Then he said: ‘Tomorrow Brother Philip will first be going in search of bread.’ And received the bag or satchel the following morning, against the will of the friars he went quietly to almsgiving with a lay friar, saying: ‘Whoever eats bread, should not blush in having to beg for bread.’ ” (LPer 11).

**21** I cannot fail to recall the fatherly words that Pope Francis addressed “extempore, without notes” during the audience granted to the participants in the 2019 General Chapter: He said, “The word ‘service’ is also what Our Lady says to the Angel: ‘I am the servant, I am here to serve’. [The Seven] imitate Our Lady precisely in this service. And they make themselves servants of her, so that she leads them precisely on this way of service. The first word: service. You are servants. Never forget this. You are not masters. Serve. ‘Look at that other person ...’. But you are a servant of that other person. ‘But that bishop ...’. You are a servant of that bishop. ‘But the Church ...’. You are a servant of the Church. ‘And the people...’. You are the servant of the people. Never move away from that founding grace which is to be a servant. Servant by choice. [...] Alexis made a choice: he was a servant by choice, to be-

come a saint. This is precisely the path taken by the Word: “He emptied himself. He made himself a servant even unto death, death on the cross” (cf. Phil 2:7-8). This is the way of service. Yes, but even more: servants. “Does this mean that I must be a slave?”. Yes. “That I must also give up certain freedoms to become a servant?”. Yes indeed!”.

I invite each of us to make the words of Pope Francis your own: “Reflect on your name: servants of Our Lady, the handmaid of the Lord Jesus, who from being Lord became a servant”<sup>31</sup>.

### *The unarmed meekness of the true word*

**22** A religious personality attracts, not drawing attention to itself but to Christ.

Philip, in his life, had the joy and the grace of meeting and attracting many young people to the Lord, inviting them to share the charism of the Servants of Mary. Among these, well documented by the 14<sup>th</sup> century *Legendæ*, we remember Peregrine, Bonaventure of Pistoia and Ubald of Borgo San Sepolcro.

The well-known episode of the clash between Philip and some young people, including Peregrine, is not narrated by the oldest *Legendæ* of the holy Prior General and only appears in the texts of the Order starting from the *Chronicon* of Michele Poccianti in 1567<sup>32</sup>.

However, some archival documents attest that Philip actually went to Forlì in the time of the interdict (26 March 1282 - 1 September 1283), most likely on behalf of Pope Martin IV, “in order to exhort its citizens to return to the obedience of the pontiff. Forced by a group of troublemakers to leave the city, Philip brought about the conversion of the young Peregrine Laziosi, who later became a friar of his Order and its saint”<sup>33</sup>.

A hint of the *Life of Blessed Peregrine* written at the end of the fifteenth century by Niccolò Borghese would seem to refer to a relationship between Philip and Peregrine that Philip's 14<sup>th</sup> century *Legendæ* do not mention: "he died at the age of almost eighty, struck by a very high fever. His soul was led to the happiness of paradise by the blessed Philip of Florence and Francis of Siena, of the same Order, and by the Virgin Mary" (LPel 9)<sup>34</sup>.

A poetic echo of these facts and of what we can apply to our lives from this episode is found in the hymn inserted in the liturgy of Saint Peregrine of Forlì and composed by our brother Paul M. Addison:

*The rage of violent factions  
divided all your town;  
God's envoy, Blesséd Philip,  
you threatened and threw down.  
With mercy he did rescue  
and touch your very soul;  
with God's own Spirit blessed you  
and made your spirit whole.*

*Beneath the Virgin's Mantle,  
with all her Servants, you  
did take the blest example  
of humble Philip true,  
and gave your life to Christ in  
a penitence of love  
and service to the lowly,  
belov'd of God above...*

**23** Fra Michele Poccianti in his aforementioned *Chronicon* documents two other effective preachings given by the Florentine saint during a General Chapter, the first in Pistoia in 1276, the second in Borgo San Sepolcro two years later. On both occasions, Philip's words particularly touch the heart of a young man.

In 1276 a young man from Pistoia entered the Order, after having listened to a homily by Philip during the General Chapter celebrated in his hometown. Philip's words - in the face of the struggles and enmities that tore the city apart - exhorted people to reconciliation with God and with neighbour. "Very many were reconciled in the Lord and, left everything to the poor. They left their family and chose Philip as their father. Under his guidance they decided to serve the Virgin in poverty". Among them was an extremely violent man, who agreed to ask forgiveness from his enemies and - following the example of Zacchæus (cf. Lk 19:8) - to return fourfold recompense to anyone he had defrauded. The young man entered the Order of the Servants of Mary taking the name of Bonaventure<sup>35</sup>.

**24** In Borgo San Sepolcro, in 1278, Philip gave a homily on the phrase of Jesus reported in the Gospel according to Luke: "Anyone of you who does not renounce what he possesses cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:33). Among the listeners, a young man was "pierced" by Philip's words, and decided to leave his home and family for the love of God, asking to be welcomed among the Servants of Mary and taking the name of Brother Andrew, in memory of the apostle who followed Jesus<sup>36</sup>.

*Welcoming young people*

**25** But how did Philip welcome young people? We know a few very beautiful words with which the *Legenda* of Blessed Joachim of Siena refers to the welcome of this young man from Siena by the Prior General in 1272. After the delicate and mysterious moment of the clarity of his vocation at the age of fourteen, the young Chiaramonte goes to the priory of the Servants of Mary “and asked for the grace to enter the Order. At that time in the Siena priory there was that very bright light, the most blessed confessor Philip, general of the Order, truly a father of great holiness. He made him welcome.” How much mystery there is in this simple expression!

Philip asks what name he wanted to call himself as a religious and the fourteen-year-old “asked for love [of the Virgin Mary] to be called Joachim.”<sup>37</sup>

It is not possible that Philip did not remember the experience he lived when, as a young man, he was made welcome by Bonfilius, the first prior of the Servite community, eighteen years previously (cf. LP 5-6). This welcome has become a lifestyle for Philip<sup>38</sup>. It is also re-echoed in the recent Constitutions of the Order: “Candidates should be received in house where they can develop fully as persons and arrive at a clear understanding of their vocation. For this purpose the provincial directory should determine an educational method based primarily on personal contact and on an adequate and gradual initiation into community life.”<sup>39</sup>

*Friendship of charity*

**26** A passage from the *Legenda de Origine*, while referring to the experience of the first Seven Fathers, helps us to under-

stand how the friendship lived by those first friars was not mere emotion, but the fruit of a wisdom that involved all aspects of life in view of the goal of pleasing God alone. In fact, in the name of this friendship the Seven make the choice of poverty (extremely significant for the social state that they came from); and always for this fraternal bond they remain firm in their purpose “to the point of giving rise to the idea of living together, in a unity not only spiritual but also of concrete life”<sup>40</sup>.

Philip breathes this spiritual climate and lives it in his relations with the friars: there were two particular figures linked to him exemplify this “friendship of charity” (LO 29).

Philip remains bound by great fraternal affection with Blessed Bonaventure of Pistoia: when, in 1285, shortly before his death, the holy Prior General went to Rome to Pope Honorius IV to deal with problems relating to the survival of the Order and its approval, a notable part of the expense incurred on that occasion for the journey and lodging in the Curia was procured by Fra Bonaventure<sup>41</sup>.

**27** Philip’s second exemplary experience of fraternal friendship was with Blessed Ubald of Borgo San Sepolcro. According to the *Legenda* of Philip entitled “Perugina”, in his last year of life Philip would have revealed “in secret to Fra Ubald of Borgo that soon he would be laying down his body and separated from them. And he obtained from him that he be present at the moment of his passing, and for this he thanked him”<sup>42</sup>.

Indeed, on the last day of his earthly life, after a serious crisis and while the friars of the community “had been assisting him in tears for almost three hours, [...] Fra Ubald of Borgo arrived who, although far away, had come to know

about the death of the holy man through the revelation of an angel of God who had appeared to him. While everyone was in prayer before the man of God, his spirit revived. Opening his eyes and mouth at the same time, with his hands raised to heaven, he blessed God and, sitting up in the arms of Fra Ubald, called for silence. He gave the friars a beautiful testimony of faith with a joyful face [ ... ] Exhorting them to humility, patience and charity he then died”<sup>43</sup>. How beautiful this fraternal friendship that accompanies you to the ultimate meeting!

### *Pity and mercy*

**28** The *Legenda de Origine* had already highlighted Philip’s conformity with Jesus from the moment of his birth<sup>44</sup>. This fact had raised a question in the author of the *Legenda de Origine*<sup>45</sup>, who had come to an interesting conclusion, addressing Mary: “And yet your servant and the Order consecrated to you have no merit, because the honour of resembling your Son was decided by you, out of your affection and your mercy” (LO 11).

The encounter with two sinful women, at the sunset of his life (cf. LP 20), constitutes for Philip the extreme identification with his Lord: it is impossible to read this episode without connecting with the Gospel story of the adulteress (cf. Jn 8:1-11), and the story of the sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee (cf. Lk 7:36-50) together with the gaze of Jesus towards these women, of which the actions of the holy friar Philip are a re-enactment in his own day.

Philip, having met the two harlots, first invites them to move away from sin, “considering the punishment that will

be given for sins". Having learned that this was the only way they had to make a living, the holy friar goes to meet them with a look of mercy. He implores them: "I ask you for this grace, for love of the Virgin Mother of God: that in these three days you do not sin with anyone; and here is some money to live on". No moralism, but only an attentive look at reality informed by his faith in his Lord.<sup>46</sup>

This attitude opens the way for grace: "And as soon as they received the money from the hand of the man of God, the grace of the Holy Spirit descended into their hearts"<sup>47</sup> comments the author of the text who, surprised, attests the action of the Spirit together with the free action of the women: "The following day there came the two harlots whom the saint had called to repentance, crying out and looking for the holy man to obtain forgiveness for their sins. Prostrated and weeping at the feet of blessed Philip, they begged for forgiveness. Blessed Philip welcomed them and forgave them. And for the future they did not return to sin, but entered a little cell and lived there in great holiness, until God deigned to grant them his glory; and thus they gave up their spirit to the Lord"<sup>48</sup>.

This seems to me the summit of our holy father Philip's conformed identification with Christ. It gives us a bright reflection of how the Mystery of God comes into enduring relationship with his creatures. God's mercy reaches into every human experience, whether of serenity or of despair, and brings a true sense of forgiveness there. The Mystery God, shown in mercy, remains the final word, even amid all the ugly possibilities of history.

## CONCLUSION

**29** I conclude this Letter by making my own the words of Pope Francis: “I hope these pages will be useful for the whole Church [the whole Order and the entire Family of the Servants of Mary] to dedicate itself to promoting the desire for holiness. We ask that the Holy Spirit instill in us an intense desire to be holy for the greater glory of God and encourage one another in this regard. Thus we will share a happiness that the world cannot take away from us”<sup>49</sup>.

May St. Philip Benizi help each and every one of us to make this attitude their own, in order to radiate in the world the awareness that “we are children of saints” and that God, through Our Lady, will guide his Servants and his Order as happened in those early days. We pray that each one of us be fruitful in fidelity to our charism, as I re-echo the prayer that we recite every year on the festive anniversary of our first great friar canonized by the Church.

*Lord God: in you the lowly are exalted.  
Through the work of Saint Philip  
you cared for the Family of Servants of Mary,  
nurturing its growth and confirming its way of life with holy rules.  
By faithful service of Our Lady, may we, like Philip,  
proclaim with apostolic zeal the Reign of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God for ever and ever.*<sup>50</sup>

FRA GOTTFRIED M. WOLFF O.S.M.  
Prior General

From our San Marcello Priory, 12 April 2021

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Gaudete et exsultate*, Apostolic Exhortation on the call to holiness in the contemporary world, 19 March 2018.

<sup>2</sup> I will refer to the following texts published in: Historical Spiritual Sources of the Servants of St. Mary. I. from 1245 to 1348, [Sotto il Monte, BG, 1998 & English: Prov Veneta Assoc.Emmaus 2000] namely: the *Legenda de Origine Ordinis* (abbreviated LO), English text on pp.189-262; the Legend of Blessed Philip called “vulgata” (LP), English text on pp.268-286; the Legend of Blessed Philip known as “Perugina” (LPer), English text pp.292-313; the Legend of Blessed Joachim of Siena (LJ), English text pp.318-334; the Legend of Blessed Peregrine (LPel), English text pp.371-384: as for the Legend of Blessed Philip called “of Sheffield” (LSh), the Italian text can be found in: Historical-spiritual sources of the Servants of St. Mary. II. from 1349 to 1495, [Gorle, BG, 2002], text on pp. 517-522. The value of these texts is indicated in a passage of the second biographical text proposed for the Office of Readings on the feast of St. Philip: “What we know of the life of St. Philip can be found, first of all, in the ‘*Legenda*’ on the Origin of the Order and in the ‘*Legenda*’ of Blessed Philip, written shortly after 1317. The historians of the Order, while recognizing some “florets” of the hagiographic genre, attach great importance to the two ‘*Legendas*’ for the testimonies they report about contemporary people.” St. Philip: Liturgy of the hours. Proper Office of the Order of Servants of Mary, Italian Liturgical Commission of the Order of Servants of Mary, 1978, p. 461. Cf. Servite Proper English edition pp 258ff.

<sup>3</sup> Since 1977 the International Liturgical Commission of the Order (CLIOS) has made available the *Proprium Officiorum Ordinis fratrum Servorum beate Mariae Virginis* and in 1978 the Italian Liturgical Commission has published the Liturgy of the Hours. Proper Office of the Order of Servants of Mary. On pages 451-471 [English OSM Proper pp.258-278] of the latter text we find the celebration of St. Philip Benizi (23 August); in the brief opening note we read, among other things: “He governed the Order with extreme balance, strengthened it with wise legislation, knew how to tenaciously defend its survival, and made it famous with his holiness. He welcomed a large number of brothers, also men of great commitment in religious life; of these Philip was teacher and model of evangelical life and service to the Virgin. With good reason, therefore, he is considered ‘Father of the Order’ ” (p. 451 Engl. p. 258). Also worth mentioning: CLIOS, *In Praise of St. Philip Benizi*. Typical edition, Marianum Editions Centre, Rome 1985 (*Laudemus viros gloriosos series, 2*); IDEM, *Book of Blessings of St. Philip Benizi*. Marianum Publishing Centre, Rome 1987 (*Laudemus viros gloriosos series, 3*).

<sup>4</sup> The early encouragement of the Order is in Cardinal Raniero Capocci’s first letter of protection to the prior and friars of Santa Maria del Monte Sonario (at this time the only community of the Order!) Called Servants of Santa Maria. It dates back to 13 March 1249: *Historical-spiritual sources I*, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Rome, General Archive of the Order of the Servants of Mary (AGOSM), historical section, Income and Expenses Register of the priors general fra Philip of Florence (1267-1285) and fra Lotharingus of Florence (1285-1330), f. 4r published in: *Monumenta Ordinis Servorum b. Virginis Mariae*, II, 1898, p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> Todi, Historical Archive of the Municipality, Decrees and Reforms, vol. 20, f. 41v, quoted in SERRA, A. M., Witnesses of worship to Blessed Philip in Todi: documentation from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, in *Historical Studies of the Order of the Servants of Mary* 36 (1986), p. 241.

<sup>7</sup> P. M. SOULIER, *Vita di san Filippo Benizi propagatore dell'Ordine de' Servi di Maria*, Tip. Poliglotta, Roma 1885, p. 580

<sup>8</sup> EUGENIO M. CASALINI, *S. Filippo Benizi dei Servi di Maria. Patrono di Todi*. Third centenary of the canonization, 1671-1971, Priory of the Servants of Mary, Todi.

<sup>9</sup> AGOSM, Entry and Exit Register of Prior Generals Fra Philip of Florence (1267-1285) and Fra Lotharingus of Florence (1285-1330), f. 2r, published in *Monumenta O.S.M.*, II, p. 136. Cf. *Monumenta Ordinis Servorum b. Virginis Mariae*, II, 1898, p. 136: "Anno Domini MCCLXXXV die prima mensis iunii, tempore domini Honorii pape IIII, year I. [...] Frater Locteringus [...] reddidit sibi Legendas, quas habebat sub pignore pro XVIII florenis aureis, quos comodavit sancto *Philippo*".

<sup>10</sup> "To honour his Mother, the Virgin Mary, the Lord had decided to offer her a house, that is, an Order consecrated to her name. Therefore, so that the friars of the Order might learn in unity to serve their Lady worthily, he wanted to give them, as a model of authentic service, the lamp we have spoken of, namely Blessed Philip": LO 10.

<sup>11</sup> See Acts 8:29.

<sup>12</sup> "The Virgin in her own life lived an example of that maternal love, by which it is fitting that all should be animated who cooperate in the apostolic mission of the Church for the regeneration of men": VATICAN II ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 65.

<sup>13</sup> This awareness is acquired by the liturgical texts of the Order. In the Collect of Mass in honour of St. Philip we pray: "O God, greatness of the humble, who through the work of St. Philip you took loving care of the Family of the Servants of St. Mary, you have propagated and consolidated it with holy laws [...] ". The Preface alludes to this when it speaks to God of Philip stating: "To show forth his humility, you illuminated him with heavenly wisdom and, as a light on the candelabra, you placed him at the over the Servite family, so that he would defend it from storms with vigour and prudence, he would honour it with his holiness and that of his disciples and endow it with wise regulations": cf. August 23. San Philip Benizi, in the Proper of the Servants of Mary, [Rome, 1973], pp. 28-32.

<sup>14</sup> *Historical and spiritual sources I*, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, the interpretation given by the Archdeacon of Milan Conte and the lawyers of the Roman Curia Angelo da Roma and Pepo da Siena who, “answering a question posed to them by the Prior General [...] declare that [...] the Order it was not overturned by the constitution of Gregory X issued in the council of Lyon, because it was founded in the rule of Blessed Augustine “without the obligation of having no possessions or income and with the concession by the Apostolic See and to celebrate General Chapter and to elect the Prior General there.”: *Ibid.* p.40

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 104.

<sup>17</sup> Rule of Saint Augustine. Constitutions of the Order of Friars Servants of Mary. General Directory of the Order of Friars Servants of Mary. Published by the authority of Fra Gottfried M. Wolff Prior General of the same Order. *Editio typica*, Rome, General Curia O.S.M. 2015, art. 7: “Our communities are to bear witness to the human and evangelical values seen in Mary and to the devotion the Church offers her”.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, art. 87.

<sup>19</sup> Letter *Exigente pie devotionis*, Arezzo 28 May - 4 June 1273, in *Historical-Spiritual Sources I*, n. 22.

<sup>20</sup> *Historical and spiritual sources I*, p. 106; text of chapter V on pp. 114-115.

<sup>21</sup> Ritual of the Servants of Mary for the memory of the deceased brothers. Typical edition. Rome General Curia OSM 1975 (Liturgical Books OSM, 5).

<sup>22</sup> See the aforementioned Benedictional of St. Philip Benizi, note 3.

<sup>23</sup> Homily of the Holy Father Francis during the Eucharistic celebration on the centenary of the beginning of the First World War, Military Memorial of Redipuglia, 13 September 2014.

<sup>24</sup> *Monumenta O.S.M.*, XI, p. 117.

<sup>25</sup> A. M. SERRA, *Filippo Benizi*, in *Bibliotheca sanctorum*, John XXIII Institute of the Pontifical Lateran University, vol. V, col. 742.

<sup>26</sup> M. POCCIANTI, *Chronicon Rerum totius Sacri Ordinis Servorum B.M.V.*, Florentiæ 1567, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> SERRA, *Filippo Benizi*, in *Bibliotheca sanctorum*, vol. V, col. 740.

<sup>28</sup> “And since the apostolic see was vacant, some cardinals of the holy mother Church indicated that he was worthy to hold the office of pontiff; among these was the venerable father and most reverend cardinal Ottaviano degli Ubaldini. The cardinals, hearing about the instant healing of this leper and many other miracles worked by the merits of Blessed Philip, all found themselves enthusiastically in agreement in considering him to be very worthy of the pontifical of-

fice. [But blessed Philip with Christian humility hid himself away for a few days from any human contact]”: LP 16.

<sup>29</sup> “Once, when Blessed Philip was in Florence and his friars, besieged by extreme poverty, did not have even a little bread in the priory and for this reason they murmured and complained. The man of God, fearing that the friars would fall into the danger of murmuring and offend the Creator with their exaggerated complaints, would say to them kindly comforting them: ‘My brothers, do not hurt yourselves by murmuring; we are in fact children of saints in whose inmost selves there is no deception’ ”: LPer 10.

<sup>30</sup> “Always recalling these things to his brothers, he offered himself as an example to those who were willing to welcome him”: LPer 17.

<sup>31</sup> Meeting of the Holy Father Pope Francis with the participants in the General Chapter of the Order of Servants of Mary, 25 October 2019.

<sup>32</sup> M. POCCIANI, *Chronicon Rerum totius Sacri Ordinis Servorum B.M.V.*, Florentiæ 1567, p. 62.

<sup>33</sup> F.A. DAL PINO, *The Servite friars of St. Mary: from the origins to the approval* (c.1233-1304), Louvain, 1972, I, p. 1123; cf. also ARISTIDE M. SERRA, *Ancient Church of the Servants of the province of Romagna*, OSM Study Centre, Bologna 1967, pp. 21-22.

<sup>34</sup> “The text reveals a possible form of personal gratitude between the two saints. Add to this the observation that from the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century an iconographic motif depicts St Peregrine next to St. Philip”: A. M. SERRA, S. *Pellegrino Laziosi, nostro concittadino. Profilo storico-spirituale*, in COMUNE DI FORLÌ. ASSESSORATO CULTURA, UNIVERSITÀ E TURISMO, SETTORE RISORSE E ISTITUTI CULTURALI, *La piazza e il chiostro. San Pellegrino Laziosi, Forlì e la Romagna nel tardo Medioevo*. Proceedings of the study days held in Forlì on 3 and 4 May 1996, [Forlì 1999], p. 80.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp. 58-61.

<sup>36</sup> POCCIANI, *Chronicon*, p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> LJ 3.

<sup>38</sup> Naturally, by institutionalizing life to regulate it, “boundaries” were defined: the ancient Constitutions - probably drafted during the chapter of 1289 - for example, already a few years after the death of the holy Prior General established the conditions for reception, and also for the Prior General it was decreed: “However the general can welcome anyone, with the positive opinion of the discretion-councillors of the priory or of the place where he will be, asking them in three chapters”: PM SOULIER, *Constitutiones antiquæ fratrum Servorum sanctæ Mariæ a s. Philippo Benitio anno circiter 1280 editæ*, in Monumenta OSM I, Brussels 1897, p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> OSM *General Directory*, 7, in the *Rule of Saint Augustine - Constitutions of the Order of Friars Servants of Mary*.

<sup>40</sup> “The friendship, which had already linked their souls so that they could rejoice together in divine and human things, also inspired them to abandon earthly things and forget them completely. It helped them to remain steadfast in this regard until they gave rise to the idea of living together, in a unity not only spiritual but also of concrete life, so as to support each other with good examples, words and deeds and then finally find themselves in body and soul in celestial glory with Christ, for whose love they were mutually bound by this friendship”: LO 29.

<sup>41</sup> *Studi Storici* of the Order of the Servants of Mary 25 (1965), p. 258.

<sup>42</sup> LPer 22.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 24.

<sup>44</sup> After noting that the Order and Philip were born in the same year and in the same city, the author of the *Legenda de Origine* asked, amazed: “What are you doing, sweet lady? Make like the one who will be your servant to your Son. This way you wish to tell us clearly how great he will be and how deserving the service he will offer you. You, Son, of the lineage of Israel and of the Jewish people, at the very moment of his birth from you, he gathered around him Gentiles and Jews, attracting the shepherds from Judea and the magi from the East; when he became an adult, he taught and redeemed Gentiles and Jews and to them, after his passion and death, he left the doctrine and the examples by which to live. So also around your servant Blessed Philip, born in the Tuscan province and in the city of Florence, you immediately began to gather people and families from the same province and city, that is, the initiators of your Order. And all these blessed Philip, having reached adulthood and shining with the wisdom of your Son, had to teach and guide until death and then again, after death, to leave the doctrine and the example of a service worthy of you”: LO 11.

<sup>45</sup> “But, oh my Lady, Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom is the credit to be attributed for so much resemblance between your beloved servant, Blessed Philip and your sweetest Son Jesus Christ?": *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> In LPer 16 it was just one harlot that went to Philip and his companions, Sosthenes and Jerome. “As religious men” the two friars dismissed; but Philip, “as a saint”, responded by calling her “my daughter”.

<sup>47</sup> LP 20.

<sup>48</sup> LP 22.

<sup>49</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Gaudete et exsultate*, no. 177.

<sup>50</sup> See 23 August. Saint Philip, in the *Proper of the Servants of Mary*, [Rome, 1973], p. 28. [English edition p. 166]

