

Saint Anthony (August 1195)

Saint Anthony was born Fernando Martins in Lisbon, Portugal. He was born into a wealthy family and by the age of fifteen asked to be sent to the Abbey of Santa Cruz in Coimbra, the then capital of Portugal. During his time in the Abbey, he learned theology and Latin. Following his ordination to the priesthood, he was named guest master and was responsible for the abbey's hospitality. When Franciscan friars settled a small hermitage outside Coimbra dedicated to Saint Anthony of Egypt, Fernando felt a longing to join them. Fernando eventually received permission to leave the Abbey so he could join the new Franciscan Order. When he was admitted, he changed his name to Anthony.

Anthony then travelled to Morocco to spread God's truth, but became extremely sick and was returned to Portugal to recover. The return voyage was blown off-course and the party arrived in Sicily, from which they travelled to Tuscany. Anthony was assigned to the hermitage of San Paolo after local friars considered his health. As he recovered, Anthony spent his time praying and studying.



Saint Anthony's Miracles

St. Anthony and the mule who knelt down before the Eucharist.

A man doubted the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, until he saw this. St. Anthony of Padua lived during the 13th century and possessed a great passion for the Real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. One day Saint Anthony heard of a man in Rimini named named Bononillo who did not share the same belief. In fact, Bononillo openly mocked people who believed that Jesus was truly present under the appearances of bread and wine.

St. Anthony tried his hardest to convince Bononillo with the proofs of scripture and argument but discovered that the man was as stubborn as a mule.

Then St. Anthony received an inspiration. He challenged the wealthy merchant, "If the mule you ride adored the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, would you believe in the truth of the Blessed Sacrament?" Bononillo agreed but decided to raise the stakes. Bononillo would starve his mule for three days and then bring it to the town square. Saint Anthony would bring the Blessed Sacrament to that same square. The mule then would be put in front of a pile of hay and St. Anthony would stand a few yards away with the Blessed Sacrament. What happened next would decide the victor.

To prepare for the event, St. Anthony fasted for three days, and Bononillo in turn told everyone in the town. Bononillo was convinced that the mule would think nothing of the Eucharist and ravenously eat the pile of hay.

On the day of the test, Bononillo brought his mule and placed the hay under the mule's nose. St. Anthony came and stood a distance away with the Holy Eucharist. Defying all odds, the mule turned his head and walked over to Saint Anthony. When the mule was close, the animal bent his front legs and knelt in adoration! When Bononillo saw this miraculous change of events, he immediately knelt down and professed his belief in the truth of the Real Presence.

What this short story tells us is that Eucharistic presence of Jesus is something miraculous and supernatural. It is a gift that Jesus gave to his Church.

Miracle of the Fish

Once Anthony had travelled to the city of Rimini because it was a hotbed of heresy. The city leaders had ordered everyone to ignore him, so no one turned up for his homilies. Wherever Anthony went, he was greeted by silence.

Anthony walked along praying and reflecting upon what had happened. As he walked outside of the town, he came to the mouth of the Marecchia River where it flows into the Adriatic. There he began to address the crowds, not of people but of fish.

He called out, "You, fish of the river and sea, listen to the Word of God because the heretics do not wish to hear it." Suddenly there were thousands of fish neatly arranged in rows, all pushing their heads through the surface of the water as if they were straining to listen to every one of Anthony's words.

The people of Rimini, seeing this miracle, gathered to listen to Anthony. What began with simple interest in an extraordinary event turned into a passionate conviction that Anthony was speaking to their very hearts. They were so moved by Anthony's words, by his call to conversion, that they abandoned their hardened positions and returned to the Church. As we stated above, we are not sure that this story is historic, but it certainly does represent a version of what often happened when Anthony preached: that many hardened sinners were converted through the unselfish love of Anthony.

Anthony always defended those who were powerless and incapable of defending themselves. He proclaimed the dignity of every person. He did this not only while he was preaching to the crowds, but also when he stood before those who were known to be cruel tyrants.

The miser's Heart

the funeral of a rich man was being celebrated with great pomp in a city in Tuscany. Anthony was present and is said to have commented that the dead man did not deserve such honour since he had exploited and oppressed the poor. "His heart is in his moneybox", said the Saint, echoing our Lord's words that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be

too". So far, so good; but the story goes on to say that, following Anthony's words, a surgeon was called in, who cut open the dead body and found no heart! A little later, when the family opened the dead man's treasure chest, there was the heart! As a result, the dead man was not buried in the splendid mausoleum that he had prepared for himself, but in a cave by the river. In the center of the fresco you can see the surgeon opening the body of the miser, and on the left a relative of the rich man who has just found his heart in the money-box.

Meditation

Through this miracle Anthony is urging us to do two things. On the one hand he is inviting us to free ourselves from the idea of materialism, the unjust accumulation of money and belongings; on the other hand he is urging us to fight poverty. I know, it is not easy to fight poverty, however if we turn away from the idols of selfishness and materialism we do have a chance. Selfishness is the curse of the human race, because selfish people are incapable of loving others, but they are also incapable of loving themselves. Materialism is the organised emptiness of the spirit because it is the logical result of the idea that above and beyond this world there is nothing else.

Aleardino's Glass

One day a knight called Aleardino da Salvaterra arrived in Padua. This knight had always despised Catholics, believing them to be ignorant and gullible. One day, while dining, his tablemates started telling him with great enthusiasm of the many miracles performed by St Anthony. As a reaction, Aleardino emptied his glass and said, "If he whom you consider to be a saint will prevent this glass from breaking when it hits the ground I will believe everything you are telling me about him." He then threw the glass to the floor with all his strength, and quite unbelievably, the glass did not break. It is even said that the hard tiles on which it fell broke instead of the glass. Faced by this inexplicable phenomenon, Aleardino believed and was converted.

Meditation

I think this miracle summons us to deepen our identity as Catholics. Now the great principle of Catholicism is the Incarnation: God made man: "The

word became flesh and dwelt among us.” But the Lord continues to make himself present in space and time through the ministry of the Church. The Lord continues to become flesh through the sacraments in the bread and the wine, in the oil and the salt, in the imposition of hands, in blessings and in the absolution of sins... In the gestures and songs of the liturgy, in the loving care of the pope, of the bishops, and of the Church’s consecrated priests... In the love for the poor. In the words and examples of the Saints.

The Re-attached Foot

A young man of Padua, called Leonardo, went to St Anthony to make his confession. Among his other sins, he confessed that he had once kicked his mother so hard that she had suffered a nasty fall. Anthony muttered under his breath, “The foot that strikes father or mother deserved to be cut off.” Of course he did not intend his words to be taken literally. The young man, not understanding the meaning of his words, returned home, took a hatchet, and chopped off his foot. The news soon reached the ears of the poor Anthony. He followed the youth’s grieving parents to their house and made his way to the young man’s bedroom. He prayed, holding the severed foot close to the leg, made the sign of the cross, and instantly the foot became attached to the leg. The young man jumped up, giving praise to the Lord and thanksgiving to Anthony, who had healed his leg in this truly miraculous way.

Meditation

With this miracle St. Anthony invites us to meditate of the Sacrament of Penance. And I suspect that the first lesson is really for the confessor, who must be rather careful about what he says to the penitent. Confession, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, is a real luxury that only we Catholics possess. It is a powerful encounter with Christ who wants to forgive our sins. In the Gospels we learn that during his earthly ministry Jesus forgave sins, and did this with his personal presence, with his voice, his hands. Naturally we are not angels, and therefore we cannot meet Christ face to face and ask him to forgive us our sins, however, we can do this physically in the confessional through a priest acting ‘in persona Christi’, that is, ‘in the person of Christ’. Saint Anthony was a great apostle of Confession. After his sermons, hundreds of people wanted to make their confessions and change their lives, and so he used to spend hours listening to them.

The Drowned Child

We are in Lisbon, Portugal. A boy called Parrisio decides to go on a boat trip with other boys, but without telling his parents. Suddenly, a violent storm breaks out and the boat capsizes. While the other boys, who were older and knew how to swim, managed to save themselves, Parrisio drowned. Upon hearing this tragedy, the boy's mother ran to the beach and pleaded with the sailors to recuperate the body. They lowered their nets and soon were able to draw out Parrisio's lifeless body, which they gave to the desperate mother. On the next day the family wanted to take the body to church for the funeral and subsequent burial, but the mother did not allow this. She continued to pray to St. Anthony, promising that if her child were brought back to life she would consecrate him to the Franciscan Order. On the third day, in front of his parents and relatives, the boy suddenly awoke as though from a deep sleep; the mother's prayers to the Lord, through the intercession of St. Anthony, had been answered. When he became older Parrisio entered the Franciscan Order, and always joyfully told his fellow friars of the wonder God had performed for him through the intercession of St. Anthony.

Meditation

This miracle has special importance in St Anthony's life because it is the first time that he brings someone back to life. However, Anthony was neither the first person nor the last to perform this type of miracle. An American Scholar, Fr. Albert Hebert, drawing from ecclesiastical sources and documents of beatification and canonization processes, was able to highlight more than 400 cases of people who were raised from the dead in the Church's history. However, it is important to emphasise that all these miracles have nothing to do with the greatest turning point in human history, the Resurrection of Christ, the event which gives us the certainty that one day we shall also be united with Him by sharing in His Resurrection. Yes, Jesus died a human death and "on the third day he rose again," but after his Resurrection he will not die again. He ascended into heaven – body and soul.let's not forget Jesus' ultimate reassurance that death has fully been defeated, and that we will all be resurrected just as He was: forever.

Tommy & St. Anthony's Bread

Tommy was a 20-month-old boy who lived with his parents near the Basilica. His mother had left him playing in the kitchen, where there was a large pot on the fire with boiling water in it. The little boy took a stool and started to peep into pot. He saw his own reflection and wanted to touch it, but in doing so he fell into the boiling water. Immediately afterward, the mother was back, and when she saw Tommy's feet sticking up out of the pot, she ran to pull him out, but the boy was already dead.

The poor mother's screams roused the whole neighbourhood, and soon a crowd had gathered at the house, including some friars from the Basilica. Seeing the friars, the woman was reminded of the wonderful miracles done by St. Anthony, and began to pray loudly for his help, promising to donate her child's weight in bread to the poor if he were restored to life. While the mother was still praying, Tommy arose as if from a deep sleep.

Meditation

The miracle of the little boy who was brought back to life gave rise to the much beloved pious practice of giving bread to the poor as a petition or in gratitude for favours received through St. Anthony's intercession. Today, bread isn't as important in our diet as it used to be in ancient times, so now the friars of the Basilica of St. Anthony in Padua encourage the faithful to participate in this beloved tradition by giving alms to the poor. To this end, since 1898 the friars have helped the poor through a charitable organisation: St. Anthony's Charities, which promotes many solidarity projects in poor countries. In this way the great tradition of St. Anthony's bread is continued in today's troubled world. Like St. Francis, Anthony had a preferential option for the poor. He and his friars would tend to people in need by asking for food and clothing from the wealthy on their behalf.

Eurilia Comes Back to Life

A young girl in Padua called Eurilia had followed her mother in one of her visits to an old lady. Eurilia however, stayed outside to gather sticks and twigs for the fire. After a while, at the end of her visit, the mother came out and found her daughter floating on a muddy pond, face up. Somehow Eurilia had slipped into the water and drowned. The poor woman waded in

and dragged the body up on to the road, but the young girl seemed lifeless. The poor mother started to cry and a small crowd gathered around her. One of the men present saw that the girl was cold and rigid, and said that she was dead. At this point in her anguish the mother begged the Saint to pray to Christ to save her daughter, "Oh please, St. Anthony, give me back my daughter." Shortly after this simple prayer everyone could see that Eurilia's lips began to twitch, and then she started to throw out the water she had swallowed. And so, after a short while, through the merits of St. Anthony, Eurilia grew warm again and came back to life.

Meditation

What really strikes us in this story is the faith of Eurilia's mother; it is a faith that never fails, not even in the presence of death. Which is not surprising, for faith does not operate in the realm of the possible, faith begins where human power ends. And in fact the Lord himself says in the Gospel: "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you" (Lk 17,6).

Some people, however, think that if you have enough faith, life will be plain sailing for you. Unfortunately, faith doesn't shield us from the hard knocks of life or from death. So, what does faith do? It gives us bearings, and thus enables us to live in a difficult world without getting lost or giving in to despair. We believers entrust our lives to the power of God, who brought his Son, Jesus, back from the dead.

A Dead Man Speaks

In Lisbon, the city where St. Anthony was born, there were two people who hated each other to death. One evening the son of one of them met the son from the rival family, which was living close to St. Anthony's parents. Filled with hatred, and seeing that no one else was around, he stabbed the other young man to death.

He then buried the corpse in the garden of Anthony's father. Martin, Anthony's father, tried to prove his innocence, but the grisly evidence found in the family garden was enough to convict the poor man of the murder.

Just when things were at their worst, God revealed to Anthony, who was in Padua, the plight of his father. Immediately, the Saint obtained permission

to go away for a night. The distance from Padua to Lisbon is approximately 1,200 miles, but Anthony was there in a couple of hours through divine intervention. In the court room the Saint asked that the body of the murdered man be produced immediately. Anthony approached the corpse and, in a firm voice, asked the man to tell who had killed him. To the amazement of all, the corpse sat up and clearly said the name of the murderer and attested the innocence of Anthony's father, who was freed at once. The revived man then turned to Anthony and asked absolution from his sins, then he died again. Miraculously, the next day the Saint was back in Padua. After all, he had asked permission to be away only over night.

Meditation

Anthony's miracle testifies to a very important value: the sanctity of human life from conception (from the human embryo) to natural death.

Pope St John Paul II began his 1995 Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, the Gospel of Life, with these words, "The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus' message... to be preached with dauntless fidelity to the people of every age and culture" (EV 1). With these words, John Paul calls all of us to be faithful to the message of Jesus Christ on the sanctity of human life. We live in times in which there is a great cultural war between a culture of death and a culture of life. As Catholics we must have the courage to proclaim the culture of life for the common good of society. This is the duty and responsibility of all of us. Therefore, we must constantly, at every level, promote the dignity of the human person and the truth that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God from the moment of their conception until natural death.

A violent husband

This miracle took place in a city in Tuscany. There was a knight in the area who was outstanding for his nobility and his wealth, but he easily gave way to outbursts of anger. One day, his wife, a virtuous lady, probably replied to him harshly, and he was overcome with rage. He beat her, raining punches and kicks upon her; he dragged her by her hair all throughout the house; eventually he stabbed her, leaving her at the point of death.

Servants and family members picked the woman up and gently laid her down on her bed.

In the meantime, the knight began to regret his beastly behaviour, and ran to St. Anthony, who was living in the city in that period. The man fervently begged St. Anthony to come and help his poor wife. The saint hurried to the house together with the husband; he knelt down, asking God to give the dying woman life and health. When Anthony prayed over her, she rose up completely well again.

Meditation

The miracle invites us to reflect on the condition of women. We have to acknowledge that unfortunately we are still living in a society where women are discriminated against or undervalued solely on the ground of their gender. Certainly, not much is done to promote a culture that recognizes equality between men and women, in legal terms but also in our daily lives.

Of course progress has been made; we no longer live in St. Anthony's times, however, the world is still confronted with old and new forms of violence and slavery directed at women: human trafficking, kidnapping of young women, forced marriages, forced conversions and forced abortions.

The Speaking Infant

A nobleman was very jealous of his wife. He had no reason to doubt of her love and fidelity, but he was easy prey to slander, and so, when his wife had their first child, he refused to recognize the baby as his own. He was more than sure that the child was the fruit of his wife's infidelity.

No matter how much the woman tried to assure him that she had not been with another man, he continued to reject his infant son.

In her desperation the wife and mother came to St. Anthony for help. The Saint talked to the nobleman for hours, and finally succeeded in making him see the absurdity behind his jealousy. Just then a nurse brought in the infant. Instantly, his old state of mind returned. At this point Anthony turned to the child and said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, speak and tell who your father is!" The infant pointed to the nobleman and, in a voice of a child years older, he said, "There is my father!" With that the father broke down in tears and took the child in his arms. This is how Anthony saved a family and a marriage from the pitfalls of gossip and slander.

Meditation

In these last years, Pope Francis has dwelt on a number of occasions on the subject of gossip and slander. In one of his famous speeches the Pope said, "Gossip can also kill, because it kills the reputation of the person. It is so terrible to gossip...at the beginning, it seems to be something enjoyable and fun, like a piece of candy. But at the end it fills the heart with bitterness, and it also poisons us".

When we detract from others in our speech, our malicious words are scattered everywhere. They continue to spread dishonour and division in people's minds days, months and even years after we have spoken them, as they pass from one tale-bearer to the next.

We have to be careful with our words so that they do not ruin others, their careers, or their personal relationships. Remember that if you are speaking badly about people behind their backs, your words say more about you than about them.

The Liberation of Padua

A few years after St. Anthony's death, Ezzelino extended his dominion by brute force to all of the main cities in the Veneto Region: Verona, Vicenza, Treviso, Feltre, Belluno and Padua.

In 1254, four years after the death of Emperor Frederick II, Ezzelino was excommunicated by Pope Innocent IV, who also launched a crusade against him. Padua was therefore besieged by the Pope's forces, which wanted to free the city of Ezzelino's tyranny. The Blessed Luke asked for St. Anthony's help so that the pope's army may be successful. Naturally, it's not only Blessed Luke who was praying, but with him were praying the citizens of Padua who were still in bondage within the city's walls.

St. Anthony appeared to two Franciscan friars (one of them is probably the Blessed Luke Belludi), and foretold them about the imminent liberation of Padua from Ezzelino's tyranny. And this is what actually occurred in 1256 when Ezzelino's troops were driven out from Padua. The citizens of the city were finally free; their prayers had been answered through the intercession of St. Anthony.

Meditation

Prayer is the most important activity in our lives. It is the principal way of developing a relationship with our Father in heaven. During the centuries, prayer has taken on many forms: speaking, singing, reading the Holy Scriptures, remaining silent... But it's basically a conversation with God; a vertical conversation, not a horizontal one. So prayer is talking to God, but more importantly, it is listening to Him. God can communicate to us through the Scriptures, through events, or even through other people, whom He uses to encourage us and to help us understand His will. No matter which way He chooses to communicate, these ways reveal to us that God loves us; that He knows what is best for us, and wants to show it to us.

But why do we pray to the saints? Well, we believe that the saints, Christians who are in heaven, remain in communion with us here on earth: we call this the Communion of Saints. What do we do when we run into trouble in our lives? We ask friends or family members to help us or to pray for us.

The saints in Heaven are our friends who stand before God, and so we can ask them to pray to God for us. And when we make such a request for their intercession, we make it in the form of a prayer.

The Saint of Miracles

As we know Anthony died in 1231 and was buried for the time being in a little church dedicated to the Virgin Mary Mater Domini, Mother of God, while waiting for the Basilica to be at least partially completed so that the body could be kept in a much worthier tomb. His funeral took place on the following Tuesday. Thousands and thousands of people followed his coffin, and they were all crying like babies because they saw him as a father, and not because he was a priest, Father Anthony, but because he was a real father to them. He had generated faith in them, and was constantly defending them. On the day of the funeral, a woman came whose name deserves to be remembered. She was called Cunizza, and had been ill for a year. A great tumor had formed on her shoulder, and she was only able to walk by hobbling along with the aid of crutches. Coming to the tomb, where Anthony had just been buried in, she prostrated herself in prayer. A short while later she realised that the swelling had disappeared, leaving her skin smooth and clear. She threw aside her crutches and stood upright,

with tears of joy, and she went home giving thanks to God and her dear friend St. Anthony.

And this was the first miracle that happened here, around St. Anthony's Tomb. The news spread rapidly, and people who were sick in the soul and body started coming to the Tomb in ever greater numbers.

Meditation

St Anthony was canonized in shortest time in the history of the Church: only 11 months. But humanly speaking the avalanche of miracles was set off by a single pebble: the faith and courage of Cunizza, an ordinary woman, a sick and crippled pilgrim who had the courage to cast herself down before the grave of St Anthony and ask God, for Anthony's sake and through his intercession, to heal her.

No-one's prayer goes unheeded by God, but when we think of our own lack of merit and our inadequacy, we sometimes lack the confidence to pray for our needs. It's merely human to turn to those we recognise as God's friends and ask them to pray for us. That was what Cunizza did: we should follow her example and pray to St. Anthony.

He was only 35-years-old when he died and was canonized less than one year afterward by Pope Gregory IX. Upon exhumation some 336 years after his death, his body was found to be corrupted, yet his tongue was totally incorrupt, so perfect were the teachings that had been formed upon it.