

# ANTHONY OF PADUA

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*Anthony was eager to preach the gospel to the Moors in hostile Morocco. He got his chance, but illness – either physical or psychological – foiled his plans. Anthony must have been bitterly disappointed and embarrassed. With great humility, he gradually learned to distinguish his own desires from God's will.*



Anthony (1195-1231), born Fernando de Bulhões in Portugal, spent his early years quietly studying scripture and philosophy as an Augustinian friar. When he was 25, the remains of five Franciscans who had been martyred in Morocco during the Crusades arrived in Lisbon. He begged local Franciscans to let him join them so he could go to Africa, and adopted the name of Anthony of Egypt, a 4<sup>th</sup>-century hermit.

Anthony reached Morocco, but was too sick to preach. When he tried to return home, his ship was blown off course. He landed in Italy, joined other friars and lived quietly near Padua – until he was asked to give a homily one day. Anthony's simple eloquence and knowledge of scripture led St. Francis to assign him to preach permanently. He made as many as 400 trips across Italy and France. His busy life was punctuated by long periods of contemplation, when he would retreat to caves above Padua to pray and incorporate what he had learned into his daily life.

Anthony is beloved for his piety, honesty and wisdom. He is remembered for his colorful miracles: he preached to attentive fish, reattached a severed foot, and even was seen holding the Christ child in his arms one night. He is invoked to find lost items because his missing psalm book was returned by a penitent student when Anthony prayed for it. He is, in many ways, the patron of the uprooted: he left safety for an unknown road as he tried earnestly to discern and follow God's will.



**“When the Holy Spirit enters a soul,  
He fills it with his fire  
and lets it enkindle others.”**

“The saints are like the stars. In his providence Christ conceals them in a hidden place that they may not shine before others when they might wish to do so. Yet they are always ready to exchange the quiet of contemplation for the works of mercy as soon as they perceive in their heart the invitation of Christ.”

**“Let your words teach and your actions speak.”**

“O God, send forth your Holy Spirit into my heart that I may perceive, into my mind that I may remember, and into my soul that I may meditate. Inspire me to speak with piety, holiness, tenderness and mercy. Teach, guide and direct my thoughts and senses from beginning to end. May your grace ever help and correct me, and may I be strengthened now with wisdom from on high, for the sake of your infinite mercy. Amen.”

**“Consider every day that you are then for the first time  
– as it were – beginning; and always act with the same fervor  
as on the first day you began.”**

**Anthony was canonized in 1232, just one year after his death. His feast day is June 13.**

## **'GIVE IT ALL TO HIM, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU ALL OF HIMSELF'**

Anthony and his superior, Francis of Assisi, were astounded by the mystery of the Incarnation. By taking human form through Jesus, God had demonstrated profound love. God had held nothing back, abandoning perfection for the sake of humanity. Francis and Anthony were fascinated "with the humility and vulnerability of Christ, who emptied himself to become one like us in all things except sin," writes Franciscan Leonard Foley. Living in absolute poverty was a way for them to imitate this sacrifice.

Anthony preached in one sermon, "The Lord of the Universe is wrapped in swaddling clothes. ... The one whose name is boundless is laid in the narrow manger. He who is the beginning and the end, the ruler of the angels, made himself obedient to human creatures. The creator of the heavens obeys a carpenter; the God of eternal glory listens to a poor virgin. Has anyone ever witnessed anything comparable to this? Let the philosopher no longer disdain from listening to the common laborer; the wise, to the simple; the educated, to the illiterate; a child of a prince, to a peasant."

Anthony said, "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart. Notice that Christ says, 'Your whole heart.' He doesn't say, 'Leave a corner of your heart for yourself.' Christ bought the whole of you by giving his whole self for you, that he might possess every part of you. Do not try to hold back any part of yourself. ... If you really wish to have the whole, then give it all to him, and he will give you all of himself."



**"The sea obeys and fetters break  
And lifeless limbs thou dost restore  
While treasures lost are found again  
When young or old thine aid implore."**

The Responsory of St. Anthony, composed by Julian of Spire

"Happy the man whose words issue from the Holy Spirit and not from himself! We should speak, then, as the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of speech. Our humble and sincere request to the Spirit for ourselves should be that we may bring the day of Pentecost to fulfillment, insofar as he infuses us with his grace, by using our bodily senses in a perfect manner by keeping the commandments. Likewise we shall request that we may be filled with a keen sense of sorrow and with fiery tongues for confessing the faith so our deserved reward may be to stand in the blazing splendor of the saints and to look upon the triune God."

**"It is useless for a man to flaunt his knowledge of the law  
if he undermines its teaching by his actions."**

"The man who is filled with the Holy Spirit speaks in different languages. These different languages are different ways of witnessing to Christ, such as humility, poverty, patience and obedience; we speak in those languages when we reveal in ourselves these virtues to others."

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### **QUESTIONS FOR CONTEMPLATION**

1. Anthony withdrew periodically to pray. His prayer set the course for his actions in everyday life, and his experiences in everyday life fueled his prayer. Do you have a special place where you like to pray or meditate? What type of setting do you find to be ideal?
2. Anthony, a quiet scholar, was eager to find glory as a firebrand martyr. He discovered he was better suited to simple preaching, and realized that was God's will for him. Have you ever thought you were following God's will, only to experience a setback that suggested otherwise? How did you respond?
3. Is it superstitious – or a sign of faith – to ask Anthony to help find a lost item?

### **MORE INFORMATION**

The Franciscans on Anthony: [www.americancatholic.org/features/anthony/](http://www.americancatholic.org/features/anthony/)  
Shrine of St. Anthony in Cincinnati: [www.stanthony.org](http://www.stanthony.org)