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On this day: St. Anthony of Padua

Gerelyn Hollingsworth | Jun. 13, 2011 NCR Today

On this day we celebrate the feast of St. Anthony of Padua, Doctor of the Church.

Dear Saint Anthony, please come 'round;
Something's lost and can't be found.

(Is there a Catholic, anywhere,
Who's never said that little prayer?)

Why does St. Anthony help us find things? Because he understands how it feels to lose something. In 1225, he was finishing his *Commentary on the Psalms:*

"He naturally placed great value on a work which was the result of many a long vigil and deep study. Still he nearly lost it. A novice who had conceived a disrelish for the austerities of the religious life, and resolved to return to the world, cast a covetous eye upon the precious manuscript, stole it, and fled. The action was prompted more by vainglory and ambition than any other motive, for he imagined he would be able to do great things with it in his own country. Anthony's consternation may be imagined when, on returning to his cell, he discovered the loss of his treasure. Not knowing whom to charge with the theft, he had, as usual, recourse to prayer, imploring Him from Whom nothing is hidden, to enable him to recover his lost book. At the same moment the novice was suddenly arrested in his flight. He had arrived at the banks of a river, when a hideous monster rose up suddenly before him, and threatening him with an axe, commanded him, in the name of the Master of the universe, to restore at once the stolen manuscript at the peril of his life. The novice returned in a piteous fright, and acknowledged his guilt with so much compunction and sincerity, that the Saint not only forgave him, but also received him back into the Order, and bestowed on him special marks of his fatherly affection."

--*St. Anthony of Padua,* [1] by Fr. Leopold de Chérancé, O.S.F.C., London, Burns & Oates, 1895, page 58.

What else did St. Anthony do?

He was a great preacher who was not afraid to speak up to bishops:

"'To you, who wear the mitre, I now address myself.' . . . Anthony spoke in defence of the truth so convincingly that the Archbishop felt himself at once enlightened and repentant. As soon as the sitting was closed he cast himself at the feet of the fearless Friar, laid open to him, with all sincerity and humility, the state of his conscience, and arose a new man full of gratitude and joy. Yet the happier of the two was our Saint who, in saving the shepherd, had rescued the flock." Page 72.

He was a professor of theology, appointed by St. Francis of Assisi:

"To his dear Brother Anthony, Brother Francis sends greeting in the Lord. It is my wish that thou teach the brethren Sacred Theology, yet in such a manner as not to extinguish in thyself and others the spirit of holy prayer and devotion, according as it is prescribed in the Rule. The Lord speed thee." Page 40.

He helped women:

A lady of Limoges was "treated very harshly by her husband; and one day, beside himself with rage and jealousy, he tore out quantities of her hair. . . . she went straight to Anthony, told him how cruelly she had been treated, and implored him to restore her hair. The singular petition called forth a smile from the Saint, but, overcome by her tears, he knelt down, and while he was praying the hair grew till it attained its original condition. What was more important, the astonished husband repented, was reconciled to his wife and ever after showed the greatest devotion and affection for the Saint and his brethren." Page 88.

He was a compassionate confessor:

"Another time it was a poor sinner, so overwhelmed with sorrow that he could not find voice to make his confession. 'Go and write down your sins,' said the Saint, 'and bring me the parchment.' The penitent obeyed, and in about an hour returned with a long list all stained with his tears. As he read out his sins one by one, they disappeared from the page, and when he reached the end the parchment was a spotless blank." Page 90.

He was a visionary:

Click here [2] for a Murillo painting of St. Anthony of Padua with the Child.

Anthony was born in Lisbon, Portugal, c. 1196. At 15, he entered the Canons Regular of St. Augustine. He was educated at their house of studies at Coimbra and ordained. In 1220, inspired by the example of the first Franciscan martyrs, he left his order and became a Franciscan.

He "died at the age of thirty-six years, on 13 June, 1231. He had lived fifteen years with his parents, ten years as a Canon Regular of St. Augustine, and eleven years in the Order of Friars Minor. . . .

"Gregory IX, firmly persuaded of his sanctity by the numerous miracles he had wrought, inscribed him within a year of his death (Pentecost, 30 May, 1232), in the calendar of saints of the Cathedral of Spoleto. In the Bull of canonization he declared he had personally known the saint, and we know that the same pontiff, having heard one of his sermons at Rome, and astonished at his profound knowledge of the Holy Scriptures called him: 'Ark of the Covenant'."

--Catholic Encyclopedia (1913). [3]

"Exulta, Lusitania felix; O felix Padua, gaude. Exalt, happy Portugal; O happy Padua, rejoice."

--Pope John Paul II, September 12, 1982, "on the occasion of his memorable visit to St. Anthony's Basilica. [4] (Click at top left to write your prayer intentions.)

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