

Homily061310

HAPPY FEAST OF SAINT ANTHONY
(Saint Anthony continues to intercede
on behalf of those who call upon his help.)

Today is the feast day of our parish patron saint, Anthony of Padua. He lived in the late twelfth century and the early thirteenth century, 1195 to 1231. He was a follower of St. Francis of Assisi and a great preacher of the word. People's hearts were touched by his words. Thousands would show up to hear him. Today, for most Catholics Saint Anthony is connected with people or things that have been lost. "Dear Saint Anthony come around, something's lost and can't be found."

The reason he is prayed to when something or someone is lost is this. One of the novices that he was charged with instructing decided to leave the Franciscan community. On his way out he decided to take Anthony's personal Book of Psalms with his notes and annotations. When Anthony realized it and realized what had happened he went to chapel to pray and continued to pray until a long way off the heart of the young man began to be troubled. Eventually he came to a change of heart and returned with the Book of Psalms. From then on, Saint Anthony was seen as one who could assist in the return of lost items or people. It was clear that Anthony was attuned to the One who came to seek out and find that which had been lost.

Jesus Christ was the original "finder" of souls. Today's readings contain stories about God's forgiveness of King David and Christ's forgiveness of the sinful woman. God had been extraordinarily good to David. God chose him to replace King Saul. God blessed the work of David's hands and made him a successful soldier and then leader of the army. God blessed him with wives and children and eventually under his leadership the twelve tribes of Israel were united, a lifelong but always unfulfilled dream until David.

But all that was not enough. He wanted more. He yearned for more. David saw a beautiful woman, lusted after her, sent for her and had relations with her and then sent her home. When she was pregnant he sent to the general of the campaign where her husband was serving and asked that he be sent to David. David tried to convince the man to go home to be with his wife while in Jerusalem but soldiers on campaign take an oath not to do so. Unsuccessful, David then wrote a note to the General of the Army to have the husband placed in fierce fighting and then have the other soldiers pull back. The man delivered his own death warrant and died in accordance with the command. Then David took his wife and added her to his own household. Adulterer, deceiver, murderer. David did some horrendous things

The prophet Nathan learns of the deed and confronts David. David confesses his guilt and asks God's forgiveness. God does forgive. The adulterous child dies. But the sword of death is upon David and his household by his own design and God reminds him now that this sword shall never leave his house even though David is forgiven. And the sword does not leave and David lives to see a number of his own sons brutally cut down. David had so totally lost his way but God's grace brings forgiveness and David finds his way again.

The woman in the gospel story is one whose sins we do not know. We do know of her lavish display of affection and appreciation toward Jesus—hair, tears, kisses, ointment. Whatever she had lost, whatever she was thirsting for, she found in Jesus. She accepted his forgiveness; she tasted real love. And it changed her heart. Once again the lost had been found.

Simon the Pharisee doesn't see himself as lost. He strives valiantly to keep the commandments. He is a faithful son of the Torah. He has little time for those who are not observant Jews. He can be a pretty judgmental guy but he doesn't find anything wrong with that because those he judges are evidently very public in their non-observing of the law. Simon does suffer from being a little too concerned about what people think or might say about him. This Jesus is a controversial figure. He has invited Jesus to his home to dine but has decided he isn't going to go overboard with hospitality. Everything is stripped down to the basics. Just dinner—and conversation.

As a result the usual touches of hospitality—a pan of water to dip your feet into to rid yourself of the dust of the road, a kiss on each cheek to show welcome, a drop of aromatic ointment to refresh the nostrils from the untoward smells of the day—none of these were offered. Simon has lost his way but has no idea that he has lost his way. He feels perfectly justified in doing what he is doing. There is being lost and realizing it and then there is being lost and not knowing it. That's the really more dangerous of the two positions. We begin to think that we are good people. We compare ourselves favorably to those around us and come out okay. We don't need another to "save" us. We think we are doing okay while that woman over there is a real mess. But she is found not him. David, as big a sinner as he is, is found but not Simon. My friends, we all lose our way at times. Individuals do. Families do. Institutions do. Churches do. Nations do. But there is One who was sent to find us when we have lost our way. That is Jesus the Christ. Anthony devoted his life to him. Ask him for his help for yourself when you find yourself lost or for anyone you know who is lost.