

Homily061420

SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA AND THE BODY OF CHRIST (He only lived 36 years but he touched and changed so many lives.)

He was 24 years old, a newly ordained member of the Augustinian Order in Lisbon, Portugal. He was bright and energetic and his community put him in charge of the monastery gate because there were many who came for food and assistance every day and Padre Fernando would see to their needs. That was his name, Fernando De Bullhoes. We have come to know him as Anthony. One day, Padre Fernando greeted some Franciscans when word reached them that five Franciscan friars (Bernard, Peter, Otho, Accursius and Adjutus) who had gone to Morocco in Africa had been martyred for their faith. The year was 1220. Their headless bodies were being brought back to Lisbon for burial. These five men were the first Franciscan martyrs. Fernando was so moved that he went to his Augustinian superiors and asked permission to transfer into this new Order of Friars. It took more than a year but permission was granted. As Fernando entered the Franciscans, their custom was to take a new name, the name of a saint. He chose Anthony of Egypt, one of the Desert Fathers from the 4th century. From that day to this Fernando has been known as Anthony.

He petitioned to be able to follow in the footsteps of those five martyrs and go to Morocco in Africa underneath the Island of Gibraltar, to spread the Catholic faith. Permission was granted. But upon arrival he was very sick and unable to do anything. The decision was made to return him to Lisbon to regain his health but the ship encountered heavy storms and was blown way off course into the Mediterranean Sea and eventually came to land at Sicily. From there Antonio was helped to make his way up the interior of Italy until he arrived at Tuscany the headquarters of the Franciscans. He was still in poor health and put on kitchen duty until he was better. A new country. A new language. They really didn't know what they had in this young friar Antonio until he was asked, in a pinch, to preach when some Dominican friars came to Francis to visit. He was spellbinding and immediately everyone realized that this was no ordinary, uneducated friar but someone with a truly brilliant mind and wonderful power of preaching and great knowledge of the Scriptures.

Francis had been reluctant to have his Friars undergo theological training because he was wary of the theological schools then in existence. But in Anthony he found a kindred spirit and entrusted all the novices to be instructed by Anthony. In addition, Anthony began to be sent out to preach missions all over Italy and into France. He became one of the most famous preachers of his day. I encourage you to read the life of Saint Anthony because he was an amazing person.

In the Breviary reading for Saint Anthony there is a short passage from one of his homilies. Anthony was a man who himself was gifted to be able to speak several languages. In the homily he encouraged his listeners to learn how to speak different languages. But he was not referring to French or Portuguese or Italian. He was speaking of the language of patience, the language of compassion, the language of gentle truth and the language of mercy. Not everyone can speak the languages of different nations but everyone can speak the languages he referenced.

Anthony loved his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and Anthony had a special love for the Eucharist where he encountered Christ as Living Bread and felt the Lord's presence. It was in the Eucharist that he received the nourishment and the sustenance that enabled him to minister—to preach and reconcile and pray. I have never struggled to believe that Jesus wanted to find a way to remain with us so great was his love for us. But I have often been intrigued by the decision He made to leave himself to us as unleavened bread and as natural wine. He, the very Author of Life, in human form would deign to remain with us by transforming himself into that which was not living precisely so that he could transform us into what is truly alive.

He came to supply us with the food that sustains and never ends. What is that food? Actually the better question is: Who is that food? And the answer is that Jesus himself is that food. Jesus himself is that bread. You know, my friends, we human beings make bread. Everywhere on earth humans make bread. And we human beings make wine. Everywhere on this earth human beings make wine. Our heavenly Creator, the Father God made the wheat and the grape. And so, Jesus takes the food that we make from the wheat and grape—bread and wine—and he transforms the bread and the wine each into himself, into his body and his blood.

But this food does not work exactly the way all our other food works. We eat food and our body breaks down the food and we absorb it and transform it further into energy and it enables us to live. We transform our food into ourselves. Even with the Eucharist. But with Eucharist, when we eat the Body and Blood of Christ this food is not only transformed into our bodies. WE are transformed. We slowly become Christ, the one whose body and blood we eat. And who is Christ? Christ is the Beloved Son of the Most High God. Christ is love itself. And there is nothing which sustains us really, more than love. This is what Anthony realized. This is what he found. This core truth.

Saint Anthony is the saint you pray to when you have lost something. “Please Saint Anthony come around, something's lost and can't be found.” But it does not only apply to car keys. It applies everywhere in our lives. When we have lost our way in life, Saint Anthony can help us to find it again. When we have lost our faith, or when one of our children has, Saint Anthony will help them find it. When we have lost the meaning of our lives, Saint Anthony will help us restore it. He helps us to live because Christ enlivened him.

Today is the feast of Saint Anthony our parish patron saint and the feast of Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ. Have you lost a zeal for the Eucharist? Going through the motions? On this day most of all ask Saint Anthony to help you find what you have lost.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.