

THE FEAST OF SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA

Originally his name wasn't Anthony. It was Fernando. (I'm guessing Fernando of Padua did not have quite the right ring to it.) Originally he wasn't Italian. He was Portuguese. Originally he was not a member of the Franciscans but rather he was an Augustinian Friar. He changed his name from Fernando to Anthony (in honor of the Desert Father, Anthony of Egypt) when he became a Franciscan. But, as it is with us too, a lot changed in Anthony's life as he set his heart on being faithful and true to Our Lord.

He was born in 1195. He died in 1231. He was just thirty-six years old. But in an age without any kind of electronic technology or communication he became well-known as a preacher and famous as a worker of miracles. All by means of word of mouth. Much as it was with his own Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, 1200 years before in Israel. There was something about Anthony that touched people. His message was simple and presented in a very understandable manner and via the use of stories as Jesus himself had done.

I have read many of the sermons of Saint Anthony that have come down to us. There is no great brilliance there but a simple and elegant portrayal of the truth of Jesus and his Church. But something in me senses that a great deal had to do with Anthony himself and how he presented his message and with what personal authenticity. At his time the Church was in a bad patch itself. Perhaps not unlike the Catholic Church today. There was corruption at very high levels in the Church. There was a lot of slippage in the practice of the faith. Like today. There was a lot of lip service to God but without the accompanying gift of self that people had promised to do. Again, like today. We need our own 21st century Saint Anthony. Don't look for him among the wise and learned though. Look for him among the very young and the fervent who are willing to risk everything. That's where people found truth 800 years ago too.