

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. Over the centuries as more and more people prayed to Saint Anthony for his intercession to find things, what he was called upon to find also underwent a change. It is one thing to pray for the return of a favorite item—jewelry, memento, keepsake, heirloom—and ask Saint Anthony to help to find such an item. I have prayed to him for many things. And even though Jesus is the original "finder" of what was lost, Anthony is blessed as Jesus was. But the finding extends way beyond material things. Think of the things we lose in life. Think of your memory. Ever lose a person's name? Do you ever ask Saint Anthony to help you to find it in your memory? It works. He finds more than your car keys. He will find you a parking spot—if you ask his assistance.

As important as these things are though they pale before some other things we sometimes lose. Ever lose your zest for life? Anthony can help you find it again. Ever lose hope for someone you love? Turn to Anthony for his help. How about your faith? Ever yearn to believe once again as you did in the more innocent years of your sojourn on earth. All is not lost. Saint Anthony will help you to find again, to recover what you have lost. People have found again relationships they have lost, and the meaning in their lives, and a renewed sense of themselves—all through the intercession of Anthony of Padua, by the grace of God.

There are so many of you who are here in church today, or praying in virtual fashion, who have found something here at the parish dedicated to Saint Anthony. You know, you can't accidentally come here. Our parish is not on the beaten track. You can't see it from any of the main roads—and yet so many people have found their way here. And then found something important and valuable here. There are so many Saint Anthony stories.

I have never told you my own. In 1991 I was the Secretary for Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. To say that my leadership was not going good would be a grand exaggeration. The Archbishop had already met with me and indicated that my talents were much more along pastoral lines than central administration. I had to agree. He had several options placed before me regarding what my new assignment would be. I cannot tell you all of them but I can tell you that Saint Anthony's was one of the possibilities. I prayed. I asked some valued friends and everything pointed to Saint Anthony's. And here I have been and served these last 30 years. I believe that the Lord desired me to be the pastor of Saint Anthony's. The only way he could accomplish that was by getting me fired from the job I had. And so I got fired. My years in central administration were less than six. My years in parish life more than thirty. That's how I found my way here.

An additional point. Saint Anthony had a great love for the poor. He wanted to make sure that everyone had enough to eat, the basic bread that sustains. There is a thing called Saint Anthony's bread. You will get some today after Mass. But the original meaning was that you would make a donation to help provide bread for those who were poor. And Saint Anthony, in appreciation, would assist you in the finding of what was lost. You don't have to give money. You can simply pray and ask. BUT. I have always thought that it surely can't hurt to sweeten the pot--\$5, \$10 sometimes even \$25. I have given \$50. \$100 for things I really wanted to recover. I have received checks for \$5000 to the parish of Saint Anthony in appreciation for things found—like an agreement to sell a business or a home. The money serves the poor. Don't be afraid to provide some Anthony Bread for those in need.

A final note. Are you lost right now? Could you be lost but without realizing it? Just that there is something off, something missing? Just can't put your finger on it. Could you be in danger of losing your soul but not realize it? That's a dangerous thing. 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 person over there is a real mess. And that guy over there, as big a sinner as he is, actually may now be found while you are not—yet. 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.

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