

St. Anthony of Padua

BORN 1195; DIED 1231
PRIEST AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH
FEAST DAY: JUNE 13

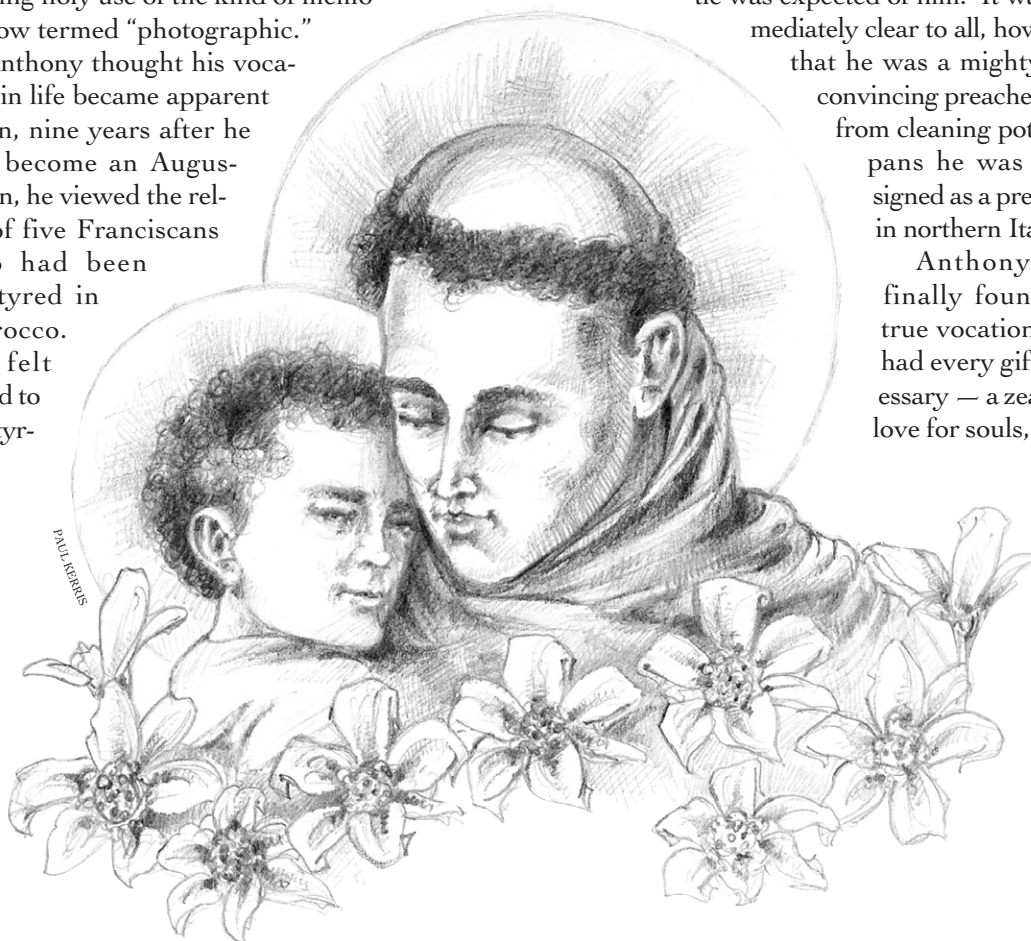
PERHAPS one of the most beloved and well-known saints of the Church, Anthony was born in Lisbon, Portugal, the son of a noble knight, Martin Bulhom, and Teresa Taveira, both devoutly Catholic. By his mid-teens Anthony had begun to realize that the luxurious life of the Portuguese court was a source of temptation to pride, ambition, and worldliness, and at fifteen he joined the Augustinian order. Yet in the Lisbon monastery, he was too near his friends and his old life, and he requested a transfer to one at a far greater distance. There he devoted himself to prayer and study, and it was during this period that he developed a truly extraordinary knowledge of Sacred Scripture, making holy use of the kind of memory now termed “photographic.”

Anthony thought his vocation in life became apparent when, nine years after he had become an Augustinian, he viewed the relics of five Franciscans who had been martyred in Morocco. He felt called to martyr-

dom and transferred, at the age of twenty-six, to the new Franciscan order, then only twelve years old, so as to undertake missionary work in North Africa. His health, however, quickly failed and he was recalled. Following his recovery, he journeyed to Assisi to attend a general meeting of the entire Franciscan order. Anthony’s brothers in religion knew nothing of his great intellect and learning, and perhaps not even he was aware of his gift for preaching. He was obliged in obedience to go wherever he was sent — to an obscure community in the mountains — and do whatever task he was assigned — cleaning up the kitchen after the community’s common meals.

Less than a year later, it happened by mistake that no one was prepared to give the homily at an ordination Mass in a nearby town. On the spot, Anthony was asked to preach; it was thought that it would not matter if he did badly, since little was expected of him. It was immediately clear to all, however, that he was a mighty and convincing preacher, and from cleaning pots and pans he was reassigned as a preacher in northern Italy.

Anthony had finally found his true vocation. He had every gift necessary — a zeal and love for souls, great





learning, surpassing eloquence, a compellingly attractive personality, and a voice that could be heard by everyone. He attracted huge crowds to his sermons, but his purpose was not entertainment, but conversion of hearts and changed lives. His holiness was so overwhelmingly apparent that at times he inspired sinners to repentance merely by the sight of him. It is likely that he had the gift of tongues, for he preached in dialects of French and Italian that he had never formally studied.

Anthony was particularly successful in convincing heretics to return to the true faith. Many were themselves educated men, and his preaching was filled with the truth of the faith as taught in Sacred Scripture. His knowledge of Sacred Scripture was so profound and his ability to persuade his hearers was so great that the pope called him the "Ark of the Testament." His superiors created for him a new position of "lector in theology" for the entire Franciscan order.

Miracles attributed to Anthony during his lifetime included healing a man's severed foot and raising a man from the dead who was needed to testify in a murder case. Crowds who stood in the rain to hear him preach were not drenched. An especially interesting story has him preaching to fish, who rose attentively from the sea, at a time when he was

thoroughly frustrated in his effort to reach the hearts of some heretics in the town of Rimini. This amazing event brought many of the heretics to repentance. One hardened skeptic, however, sought to test him with a hungry mule, which

was to choose between approaching the Eucharist in Anthony's hands and its own fodder in the hands of its owner. The animal ignored its food and instead came to Anthony, knelt, and revered its Creator. Finally convinced, the heretic returned to the true faith. Once, it is told, while at prayer Anthony was seen in adoration of the Christ Child in his arms. While these stories can no longer be verified, they are completely Franciscan in character.

Anthony's most rewarding ministry was in Padua, Italy. His efforts to reform the city led to the healing of old quarrels, restitution of goods gained from shady business practices, and closing of the city's debtor's prison. He was also known for his care for the poor, so that alms are sometimes called "St. Anthony's Bread." For reasons no one can explain, St. Anthony has become most known in

popular piety as the "finder of lost items." This title does not even begin to plumb the greatness of this saint, who used his prodigious gifts to bring so many of the lost sheep of Italy and France to God.

"His holiness was so overwhelmingly apparent that at times he inspired sinners to repentance merely by the sight of him."



Holy card expressing devotion to the Child Jesus.

