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Seasoning the Seasons™

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Saint Anthony of Padua

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"Tony, Tony, turn around. (_____) is lost and must be found!" If you are a Catholic of a certain age, you most likely grew up hearing this invocation when something could not be found. Chances are you are still repeating this today if you have lost something. So just who is this "Tony" whose assistance we are requesting? He is one of the Catholic Church's most well-known and beloved saints, Saint Anthony of Padua.

Saint Anthony was born in Lisbon, in what is now Portugal, in the year 1195. He came from a well known family, and his baptismal name was "Fernando." As a teenager, Fernando joined the Augustinian religious order. He spent a number of years studying theology and was ordained a priest. During this time, there were Franciscans who had been sent to Morocco to preach Christianity, where they were martyred. When the bodies of the first of these martyred Franciscans were brought to Fernando's monastery, this event had a tremendous impact on him. He wanted to follow in the footsteps of these Franciscan martyrs, and left the Augustinian order to become a Franciscan. In his new life as a Franciscan, Fernando adopted the name "Anthony."

Anthony's dream of giving his life for his faith in Morocco was cut short by illness, which forced him to return home. But his ship encountered storms and he ended up on the Sicilian coast, where Franciscan friars at nearby Messina cared for him.

Another pivotal event in Anthony's life occurred in the year 1222 when he attended an ordination. When the provincial wanted someone to give a sermon, no one stepped up to the plate so the task fell to Anthony. It was in this moment that his great gift of preaching was recognized.

Even though he was a very gifted preacher, Anthony realized that actions speak louder than words, and he set out to live a simple Gospel-inspired lifestyle. Just as is the case today with Pope Francis, many people were very touched and moved by the witness Anthony gave by his simple style of living.

It was Saint Francis of Assisi who wrote to Anthony and asked him to teach theology to Anthony's fellow friars. Anthony was the first friar to take on this task. Two volumes of Anthony's sermons still are in existence today.

In 1226 Anthony became the Franciscan provincial in northern Italy. (Padua was an important city in



Saint Anthony of Padua
Bernardo Zenale, 1500-1510

northern Italy.) Not too long after this, when he was thirty-three years old, Anthony had the occasion to meet Pope Gregory IX in Rome. Anthony was invited to preach, and once again the response to his gift of preaching was phenomenal – some even said it was an event like Pentecost!



Anthony of Padua
unknown author of the
Belarusian school of icon painting, 1744
National Arts Museum of the
Republic of Belarus

Anthony once again became ill, and requested to step down as provincial. He continued to preach, though, and the crowds that came to hear him in Padua were massive. The effort expended in his preaching took its toll on Anthony, so he went to a nearby town to rest. But he soon realized that death was imminent, and he wanted to return to Padua. He never quite made it there. Anthony died in 1231 at the age of thirty-six years. After his death, so many miracles took place at Anthony's tomb, that the following year (1232) Pope Gregory IX declared Anthony a saint. In 1946 Pope Pius XII declared Anthony a Doctor of the Universal Church. He is known as the "Evangelical Doctor."

In Portugal, many weddings take place on the June 13 feast of Saint Anthony, and the brides are called "Saint Anthony's brides." Grilled sardines are plentiful on the streets of Portugal this day, as well. This goes back to a story that says once when Saint Anthony was upset that some people did not listen to his sermon, he went to preach to the fish! Basil and sangria are also popular on Saint Anthony's feast day, as is "Saint Anthony's bread." There is a tradition that some people, when their prayers of intercession to Saint Anthony are answered, make a donation to the poor. This might be a monetary donation, but sometimes individuals and even parish communities bake small loaves of bread in honor of Saint Anthony which they then distribute to the

poor and hungry.

And people continue to pray to Saint Anthony when they have lost or misplaced something. There is a story that once a young monk left the monastery taking Anthony's prayer book with him. This was before the time of the printing press, so the book would have been valuable – plus Anthony had his notes jotted down in it. When he realized his book was missing, Anthony prayed for its return. Both the book and the monk returned to the monastery!

In art, Saint Anthony of Padua is often depicted with a lily (a symbol of purity); a book due to his education and teaching; and/or the child Jesus (it is said that Saint Anthony once had a vision of the child Jesus).

Celebrate Saint Anthony's feast day in your home or parish. Share some stories from his life, read the Bible, bake some bread (and share some with the poor!), put lilies on your table, enjoy grilled sardines and basil, and raise a glass of sangria in a toast to Saint Anthony of Padua!