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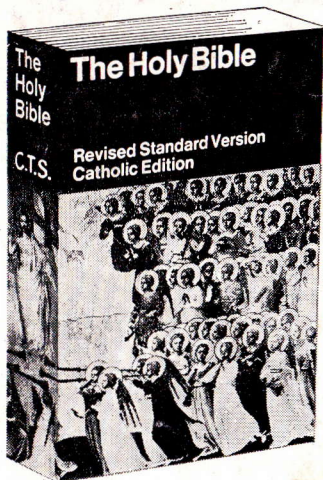
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# St Antony of Padua

By

**Benedict O'Halloran O.F.M., M.A.**



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## ST ANTONY OF PADUA

by

Benedict O'Halloran O.F.M., M.A.

I CAN remember some tiny girls from a convent school seeing, for the first time perhaps, a Franciscan walking down the aisle of their chapel. How they wriggled in their excitement and how noisily they whispered to one another: "St Antony! St Antony!" The priest of course was flattered but he wondered why it was St Antony and not St Francis! To those children and indeed to many grown-ups a man dressed in the brown habit is like St Antony. Strange, is it not, how the disciple has outshone the master here? St Francis is a favourite saint, there is no doubt about that, but he does not seem to have caught the popular imagination in the same way as St Antony, who has been called by one of the Popes 'The Saint of the World'.

The title is a fitting one in every way. He was born in Portugal, Divine Providence sent him to Italy, he spent a long time preaching in France, and now he is the saint ready at hand to help in any domestic difficulty in the Catholic households of every nation. To the Portuguese he is St Antony of Lisbon, for in that town he was born years ago towards the end of the twelfth century. Ferdinand was his baptismal name, and he came of noble stock. His parents put him to the Cathedral School at Lisbon where he was brought up until he was about fifteen years old, and by then he had realized that he was called to the priesthood and the religious life. He joined the Canons Regular of St Augustine and entered their novitiate in a monastery at Lisbon. But here he was pestered by visits of friends and relations. To a boy who is putting his vocation to the test, discovering whether he is able to leave the world behind and offer himself without reserve to God, even the visits of parents can be unsettling. Some of his more worldly acquaintances may have urged him to give up the idea and return and make a name for himself outside,

for he was a boy with many gifts. To get away from all this he asked his superior to allow him to retire to a monastery some distance from his home town, and he was sent to the monastery of the Holy Cross in Coimbra, the capital of Portugal at the time. Here for eight years he studied hard the Sacred Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church.

It was while he was a student at Coimbra that he first set eyes on the habit he himself was to glorify. St Francis of Assisi had only just founded his Order of Friars Minor. His followers did not live in roomy monasteries but wandered over the country, with poor little dwelling places as headquarters, sleeping where they could on their journeys, in barns, in abandoned churches, in the ditch. They preached first by example, for their very coming impressed the people—it was easy to see that these men held the key to happiness; their faces expressed tranquillity and joy, their words and actions patience and gentleness. They were workers ready to turn their hands to any kind of work, provided it helped in the saving of souls. St Francis, like our Lord, sent out his brethren two by two, and one pair came to Coimbra, begging, to the monastery of the Holy Cross, where they were received by the young monk Ferdinand, who happened to be Guest Master. He brought them food and entertained them, and he could not help being struck by their appearance—abject poverty, yet radiant good spirits and the fire of Divine Charity warm within. Admiration may have enkindled the desire to join them and share their way of life, but nothing came to light until his second personal contact with Franciscans.

You must remember that at this time the Christians were at war with the Infidels. The Moors still had a footing in Spain and were a continual threat to Western Christianity and civilization. To Francis this meant missionary work and he told six of his brethren to go and convert the Moors in Morocco. One fell sick and the other five journeyed on without him. They passed through Coimbra on their way and were put up at the Augustinian monastery, and once again Ferdinand played the host. You can imagine his renewed interest as he served them and watched them and spoke to them, five men bound for Morocco and hoping for martyrdom there. When they

moved on they left in the breast of the young monk the fervent intention of becoming a missionary. The story of the Moroccan martyrs deserves a fuller treatment than can be afforded in this pamphlet, but sufficient to say that despite threats and blandishments they persisted in preaching the Gospel, until the King slew them with his own hand. The mangled remains were rescued by Christians, placed in silver caskets and brought back to Spain. A grand procession met the relics at Coimbra and they were brought to rest in the Holy Cross Monastery. Watching this veneration of the remains of men he had said good-bye to only a few months before was Ferdinand.

### Antony becomes a Friar

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, and the example of the first Franciscan martyrs began a great work in the soul of Ferdinand. He could not rest until he had offered himself as a sacrifice in the mission fields. He begged his superiors to allow him to leave the Canons Regular and join the Order of the Poor Man of Assisi, so that he might gain the chance of martyrdom. The permission was ultimately granted and in the year of our Lord 1221, in a little friary in Coimbra, the Friary of the Olives, he received the Franciscan habit and changed his name to Antony. No doubt by now he was an ordained priest, and with all his learning he came as a great acquisition to the friars, but he had entered the Order to go on the missions and win the palm of martyrdom and he gave no indication of his mental abilities. After spending a quiet year in the friary he set out with a companion for North Africa. He succeeded in getting as far as Morocco but hardly had his foot touched shore when he was struck down with a fierce fever. He lay on a sick bed for months and helplessly watched all hope of missionary work disappear. It was a hard lesson, but one which all of us encounter at one time or another, that man proposes but God disposes. Antony gave up the project and humbly took ship back to Spain. Once again it seemed that misfortune dogged them, since a storm blew up and drove the ship from its course and cast them on the shores of Sicily. It was the Providence of God still at work, giving St Antony to Italy.

From Sicily he made his way up to Assisi to be present at the famous 'Chapter of Mats'. Five thousand friars attended and they slept on the ground sheltered by roofs of rush and willow, and the neighbouring people drove in with all kinds of things to eat. Brother Elias presided over the gathering, and at his feet sat St Francis. St Bonaventure was there too, and St Dominic and a future Pope, Cardinal Ugolino. Antony was little more than a novice and he seems to have been overlooked, for when all matters were settled and everyone else had an office or mission, he was left unprovided for. He approached Brother Gratian, Provincial of Romagna, and asked to be admitted into his Province, if the Vicar General agreed, so that he might learn more about the friars' way of life and discipline. Once again he kept quiet about his qualifications and was looked on more or less as a priest with enough Latin to get him through the Mass. He was accepted by the Provincial and posted as chaplain to a House of Recollection. This was one of those houses set apart from the bustle of everyday life, tucked away in the country, to which friars could retire and interrupt their busy mission work and wanderings by a few weeks' intensive contemplation. The one St Antony served was Montepaolo, situated in beautiful surroundings on a hill near Forli. His chief duty was saying Mass for the others—remember, there were not many priests in the Order at first—but he helped out in the household tasks of cooking and cleaning. No one dreamt that he was a cultured man destined to make Italy ring with the sound of his name.

#### A magnetic preacher

The way in which he emerged from his retreat was unusual, comical almost. An ordination was held at the near-by town of Forli, and according to custom the Dominican and Franciscan candidates were afterwards entertained at the Franciscan friary there. As a rule the Dominicans had been sending along a preacher to this ceremony, but through some misunderstanding they came this year unprepared, so that when the time came for the address no Dominican would ascend the pulpit and deliver a sermon. Nor would the Franciscans—perhaps they

did not consider themselves competent for the kind of sermon expected. The responsibility was being palmed from man to man until the Guardian settled it by ordering Antony to go up. He demurred in all humility but seeing that the Guardian was determined, he ascended the pulpit. The words came haltingly at first, but once in his stride he amazed the little congregation by his eloquence and learning and fervour. From that moment his preaching career began. The Guardian got in touch with the Provincial who recalled him from the Retreat House and commissioned him to go round preaching in the Province of Lombardy.

Statues of the saint show him to be tall, slim and divinely fair, which is artistic exaggeration, for he was short, stout and not particularly handsome. Nevertheless, he was well equipped for the all-important work of preaching. Natural gifts were his, he had the training, and God showered on him special graces. Crowds were drawn by his magnetic personality, the simple faithful, hardened sinners and heretics alike. They queued up for him as people will to-day only for football matches and the theatre. Business men closed their offices, workmen laid down their tools; women rose early in the morning or remained overnight in church to make sure of getting a good seat. The churches could not hold the multitudes, and most of his sermons were given in the open air. Fortunately he had a loud sonorous voice which carried his words to the back of the largest congregation. Once he was preaching outside when a storm arose and threatened to drench the people, who grew restless and looked around for shelter from the rain. He told them to stay where they were and listen to him and they would be all right. They stayed, and while the rest of the locality suffered a heavy downpour the congregation remained quite dry. Another time he was speaking from a high hoarding that had been specially erected for him when he warned the people that the devil was up to tricks and that some mischief was about to occur, but they were to remain calm and not be afraid. In the middle of his sermon the platform collapsed with a terrific crack and clouds of dust, but neither St Antony nor any listener was injured.

The age in which St Antony lived and which he sought to

improve by his teaching was not very different from our own, fundamentally. There was the same everlasting battle between good and evil. For the Communists who threaten Western civilization and Christianity to-day substitute the Saracens. There was the same widespread materialism and immorality, which pretends to offer freedom but bequeathes instead discontent and unhappiness to the individual and to society. By the thirteenth century Feudalism had outlived its usefulness and far from being a protection for the poorer classes it had grown a burden. Italy was torn with internal struggles as the result of local politics, and the poor peasants and townfolk had to help their overlords in these unwanted wars. Town fought town, and families engaged in prolonged feuds; everywhere was violence and bloodshed. Even the Church suffered; ecclesiastical offices were put up for sale and the wrong men intruded into the clerical state and flourished in influential positions.

You would be wrong if you imagined that nobody tried to reform this state of affairs. Many good men did all they could to restore order. Popes and bishops, priests and laymen, preached the necessity for going back to religion and the sincere practice of the principles of Christianity, but they were up against the selfishness of men and vested interests. And there were reformers who started off perhaps with good intentions but who overstepped the limits and finished up by rejecting the right of any authority, civil or ecclesiastical. Furthermore, there were those, and we have them to-day, who under the banner of social reform attacked the Church they hated and exploited the general dissatisfaction and unrest.

### Champion of Church and people

St Antony was the very man to champion the Church and win back the lapsed Catholics. He found a warm place in the hearts of people wherever he went. He spoke with the passionate conviction of a revolutionist, but he was always the orthodox theologian, and inspired with a love of the people he wished to save. One perceptible gauge of his success and the success of other Franciscan preachers of the time was the growth of the Third Order. It had been founded by St Francis

as an Order for men and women who wished to remain in the world and yet live a much better life, nearer perfection. By their Rule these men and women could follow the Franciscan ideals of Justice, Charity and Peace in social life, and Penance, Purity and Poverty in private life. They rejected the tyranny of feudal Barons, the tyranny of fashionable extravagance in dress and food, by their refusal to bear arms and take oaths and by their modesty and moderation. St Antony fought for the freedom of the people—freedom from political oppression indeed, but even more so for the freedom from the clogging chain of greed and gluttony and lust, by advocating the practice of poverty, penance and purity.

St Antony was a brave man and he took the fight right into the enemy's territory. In Italy he went to the stronghold of the Albigenian heretics in Rimini. They had already severely beaten preachers who had come to win them over. When Antony approached they simply would not listen, they just ignored him. Then it was that St Antony is recorded to have worked his first miracle: "Inspired by God, St Antony went one day to the riverside hard by the sea, and standing thus upon the bank, betwixt the river and the sea, began to speak after the manner of a preacher sent by God unto the fishes: 'Hear the Word of God, O ye fishes of the sea, since the infidel heretics refuse to hear it'. And when he had thus spoken, forthwith there came unto him to the bank a multitude of fishes, great and small and middle-sized, that never in that sea nor in that river had been seen so great a multitude; they all held up their heads above the water and all stood attentive towards the face of St Antony, one and all in much great peace and gentleness and order; for in front and more anigh the bank stood the smaller fish, and behind them stood the fish of middle size, and further behind, where the deeper water was, the greater fishes stood. Therewith the fishes being thuswise set in order and array, St Antony began solemnly to preach." This meticulously charming account in the *Fioretti* proceeds with the sermon, which was very like the talk given by St Francis to the birds. All the fish stayed in their places until given permission to go, and by the time this was granted a large crowd of interested spectators were collected behind the

saint and they were ready to listen to him as soon as he turned back from the sea and addressed them. He spent many days in Rimini preaching and disputing, always courteous and winning the goodwill of everyone.

### In France

St Antony was sent to France at about the same time as Blessed Agnellus of Pisa was sent to England. In Languedoc the heresy of the Albigenses and the Waldensians was very strong, and it enjoyed the support of the local barons. But no matter how well backed they were, the saint approached them fearlessly; a contemporary Franciscan wrote of him that he, "who in former days had thirsted for the chalice of suffering with such a greedy heart, was not to be deterred by the lofty estate of men, nor yet by the fear of death, but with admirable courage resisted the tyranny of princes". A good story of his frankness and fearlessness is told of him when he was preaching before Simon Sully, the Bishop of Bruges. In the middle of an attack on sin the saint turned round to the Bishop and unexpectedly cried out, "And that goes for you too, you with the mitre on". The prelate, it must be known, was not a notorious sinner, on the contrary he was a close friend of Antony's, but the story simply illustrates the saint's disdain of human respect. In France too occurred one of his most widely-known miracles, the one in which the mule disregarded a feed of oats and went on its knees in adoration of the Real Presence. The name of Antony became famous throughout France and so formidable was his attack on false doctrines that he was dubbed 'The Hammer of the Heretics'. He had to leave the country suddenly because a notice from Brother Elias reached him, informing him of the death of their Founder, Father Francis, and convoking a General Chapter at the Portiuncula on the next Feast of Pentecost.

### At Padua

After the Chapter he stayed in Italy and began a course of Lenten sermons which took him to Milan, Florence and finally Padua. Padua was an important town, prosperous in trade

and banking, beautified by fine churches, university colleges and commercial buildings. Unhappily, like every other city in Italy it was spoilt by war and bloodshed. The Paduans were privileged to win a special place in the saint's heart, he did more for them than for any other people. On their side, they took him to themselves, and never had such crowds attended his sermons, and never had there been before such a steady response to his preaching. Feuds that had dragged on for generations were settled, quarrels patched up, thieves made restitution, often in public at the feet of St Antony. He acted as intercessor for friends of the Paduans in the merciless hands of the tyrant Ezzelino da Romano. He was unsuccessful but the mere fact of braving the despot and appealing to him and then being left free to go unmolested says a great deal for the respect in which he was held. More successfully did he fight against the curse of the Middle Ages, money-lending. Unscrupulous men lent out money at exorbitant rates, at as much as 50 per cent interest, and once they had their clients in their power they robbed them of everything, their property and their very freedom. It was through the good offices of St Antony that the first bankruptcy law was passed in Padua. In the Municipal Library of the town a document is preserved stating that no one in Padua could be imprisoned for debt so long as he was willing to surrender what property he had to pay his creditors. Immediately after it comes the note: "Passed at the request of Brother Antony of the Friars Minor".

### Death—and a dispute

In his thirty-sixth year the saint felt his end approaching. He had sacrificed himself in the service of God, not by having his head cut off by Moors, but by expending his energies and wearing himself out preaching in Europe, to the heretics and to the faithful. To prepare for death in complete solitude he retired to a little hermitage some way out of the town. They say that the friars in the hermitage built him a tiny hut in the branches of an enormous tree. Even this did not secure him peace and quiet, since the news of his presence soon spread around the district and the local country people flocked

to the friary and gathered underneath the tree. Nor did he send them away. However, it could not go on, and on Friday, June 13th, 1231, he was taken very ill. He asked to be taken to Padua, so they placed his weak body on an ox cart, and a sad procession made its way to the town. Antony never reached Padua alive, for his condition became so critical that they had to stop and take him into a little hospice at Arcella where a chaplain of the Poor Clares lived. After a short moment of recollection, the dying friar made his confession and received Viaticum and Extreme Unction. Just before he died he broke out into song, singing a favourite hymn of his to our Lady. A great change came over the body, the skin gleamed and limbs grew soft and supple, while his face took on an expression of peace and joy.

It is paradoxical that the saint who had preached against discord all his life should give rise to a dispute by his very death—a pious dispute, if you like, but a keen one. He had expressed a desire to be buried in the cemetery of his own friary in Padua, St Mary's, and naturally the friars too wanted the body there. The Clares had other ideas. Since he had died in a house attached to their convent, then he should be buried in their cemetery. The friars decided to keep the death of Antony quiet until the matter was straightened out, but by some means or other the news reached the children of Padua and they were soon running all over the city crying out "The Saint is dead! Father Antony is dead!" The people thronged the roads to Arcella, and naturally those who lived nearest got there first and when they heard of the nuns' intention to bury him there they supported the scheme wholeheartedly and made preparations to resist any attempt to remove the body. As it happened, the Paduans did make spirited efforts that night to capture the relics but were beaten off. The following morning the news of Antony's death had spread all round the country and from every quarter men, women and children streamed in to venerate the man they had loved and held a saint. In the meantime, the Bishop had ordained that the body be buried at St Mary's Friary, but it was only after threats of severe punishment that the local people allowed a quiet passage. At the funeral a long procession was formed ;

the Bishop and his clergy headed it, the friars were there of course, and representatives of the civil authority and professors from the university—all accompanied the body to its resting place in the Franciscan graveyard.

### Miracles and canonization

The early biographers of the saint tell us of the wonders that took place on the day of the funeral and afterwards at the tomb: "There the blind regained their sight, the deaf their hearing, and the lame the use of their limbs; there the tongue of the mute was loosed and gave praise once more to the Lord. There every favour and grace asked for in faith and confidence was granted. The fame of such wonders soon spread everywhere, so that there were seen people from the north and south and from the east and west coming to the tomb in devout pilgrimage." The Paduans undertook to build a grand basilica for their saint, and as soon as was feasible they transferred the body from the graveyard into a reliquary to be placed within the unfinished church. When the grave was opened it was found that although the flesh had gone to dust the tongue stayed as fresh and red as though the saint had just died. St Bonaventure, the Minister General, who was presiding at the translation of the relics, took up the tongue reverently in his hands, and, profoundly moved, broke out into these words: "Blessed tongue, which always praised the Lord and taught others to praise Him, now it is clear how precious thou art in the sight of God". As the work of the basilica progressed the reliquary was placed in a special chapel, the Chapel of St Antony, a glorious piece of architecture and a fitting repository for the relics of a saint.

Within a month of Antony's death a petition had been prepared imploring the Pope to bring forward his cause for canonization. The Pope then reigning was Gregory IX, the Cardinal who had been present at the 'Chapter of Mats' which Antony had attended at his first coming to Italy. He authorized an enquiry into the miracles that were occurring at the tomb of the saint and through his intercession. On the Feast of Pentecost, May, 1232, before the Franciscan friar had been dead a year, he was canonized. An ancient tradition

tells us that his mother had the rare privilege of witnessing her son's being declared a saint and heard the Pope proclaim that "Blessed Antony of holy memory, of the Order of Friars Minor, who while on earth was celebrated for the grandeur of his virtues, now in heaven shines with the glory of innumerable miracles which demonstrate in the clearest way the greatness of his sanctity".

### The growth of devotion

The devotion to the new saint naturally began at Padua and was strongest among the Franciscans but in a remarkably short time it had spread all over the world. So numerous were the miracles wrought in his name that men called him 'The Wonder Worker'. An early biographer, giving details of over fifty miracles, concludes by saying: "The God of Majesty was pleased to work through the medium of His servant, the Blessed Antony, many other prodigies which are not mentioned in this book. From such an abundance I have selected but comparatively few; for if a historian were to give in detail all the proved miracles of St Antony, he would but make himself tedious to the reader and perhaps engender doubts and scruples in weaker souls." Tuesday became the day of the week dedicated to St Antony because it was the day on which he died. This dedication was confirmed by the Devotion of the Nine Tuesdays. A young wife who was childless went to the statue of the saint in a Franciscan church and told him that she and her husband dearly wished to have a son. In answer she was told to pray before the statue for nine Tuesdays running. She did what she was told and happily enough bore a child—but, to her bitter disappointment, it was pitifully deformed. Back she went to the statue and placed the poor child on the altar—some say she vowed to dedicate her boy as a priest—and when she took him up again no trace of the deformity remained. His Holiness Pope Leo XIII granted a plenary Indulgence on the usual conditions to those who spent some time in meditation or vocal prayer or other works of piety, to the glory of God and in honour of St Antony on that special day of the week; the number was raised from nine to thirteen.

### Finder of lost things

In Franciscan churches Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is given every Tuesday in honour of the saint, and during it the *Si Quaeris* is sung to a beautiful plain-chant melody. The hymn recounts the glories of the saint, and in the last verse it stresses how articles that have been lost are found by St Antony. This, I believe, is the key to the popularity of the saint. There is no doubt about it, he does help us to find things. Many readers of this pamphlet, I am sure, have had experience of this—a mislaid purse, a bag left in a train, precious jewels lost, important papers missing, and St Antony has listened and what is lost is found. In the little prayer book *St Antony's Treasury* a special prayer is printed asking him for help: "O great St Antony, who has received from God a special power to recover lost things, help me that I may find that which I am now seeking. Obtain for me also an active faith, perfect docility to the inspirations of grace, disgust for the vain pleasures of the world, and an ardent desire for the imperishable goods of everlasting happiness."

The second half of the prayer is a form of postscript to keep our sense of proportion and to remind us that it is not just a question of asking and receiving. The danger with this devotion to St Antony is the element of superstition that might creep in. First, do not confine your requests to material objects, the finding of which makes life more comfortable; remember that he is more willing to help you become more perfect. Then do not let the traffic be only one way—make some promise to the saint, a contract to perform an act of charity or mercy if he hears you. Remember Louise Bouffier, a pious girl living in Toulon, who found the door of her workshop stuck fast one morning. A locksmith was called and all his keys tried, and still the door would not budge. "Try the keys once more," said the girl; "I have promised St Antony some bread for the poor. Perhaps he will help!" He agreed to have one last try and with the first key the door opened without difficulty. A statue of the saint was put by Louise in her shop and it soon became a shrine where others came to ask help of the saint. Two boxes were placed near, one for receiving the written requests for health, safety on voyages, conversions



and all manner of favours, while the other was for the alms in thanksgiving to be used for the relief of the poor. This all happened at the end of the last century and now nearly every Franciscan church has a box for 'St Antony's Bread'.

### Doctor Evangelicus

St Antony is invoked as the special protector of letters in the post; he has been made the Patron of youths in Seraphic Colleges (junior seminaries of the Franciscan priesthood); he is the Patron of the Franciscan Missions, too; the Republic of Padua has constituted him their special guardian saint; he has been called 'The Saint of the World', 'The Hammer of the Heretics', 'Ark of the New Testament', 'The Wonder Worker'. Now in our time he has received yet another glorious title—'Doctor Evangelicus'.

Many men have earned themselves the name of Doctor, especially among the learned philosophers and theologians of the Schools in the Middle Ages. It was the custom to designate them by an epithet suggesting their characteristic excellence. So we get, for example, the three Doctors of the English Province: 'Doctor Subtilis' for Duns Scotus, 'Doctor Irrefragabilis' for Alexander of Hales, and 'Doctor Mirabilis' for Roger Bacon. But these men are not Doctors of the Universal Church. In addition to showing outstanding cleverness and teaching, and living a life of unusual holiness, the official declaration of the Church is required. The Franciscan Order could boast only one Doctor of the Church, St Bonaventure, 'Doctor Seraphicus', until a few years ago when on January 16th, 1946, Pope Pius XII issued an Apostolic Letter, 'Be glad, fruitful Portugal', constituting St Antony of Padua a Doctor of the Universal Church.

By his action the Pope has put his official seal to the practice of tradition, for, in the Holy Liturgy, the Mass and Office in St Antony's honour was taken from that of the Doctors of the Church. The statues of the saint, too, have always shown him with a lily in one hand signifying purity, and in the other an open book to denote learning. It is because of a later legend telling of the appearance of the Child Jesus that we now see the Divine Infant resting on the open pages. 'Doctor of the Holy

Gospel' is a wonderful distinction for even a saint to bear. No one would think of claiming Antony to be one of the Church's greatest intellects, on a level with Bonaventure or Thomas Aquinas, nevertheless the Church has thought fit to place him in the ranks of these learned men because of his knowledge and exposition of the Bible. Remember he had studied long at the Santa Cruz, the Holy Cross monastery in Coimbra, which ranked as one of the best centres of higher learning in Portugal. As a Franciscan his talents did not remain long unrecognized, for shortly after he began preaching he received this characteristic note from St Francis: "To Brother Antony, my Bishop, Brother Francis sends you greetings. It is my wish that you teach Sacred Theology to the Friars in such wise, however, as the Rule requires, that they do not by this study extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion. Farewell." This brief, humorous injunction created Antony the first officially appointed lector of Sacred Theology in the Order. The title 'Doctor Evangelicus' puts the seal on him as a Franciscan. It sums up his teaching and life which turned on the Rule of St Francis, which is "to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ". He was a theologian after St Francis' heart. As the Poor Man of Assisi put it in his Testament: "All theologians and those who minister to us the most holy words of God, we ought to honour and venerate as those who minister to us spirit and life". That is precisely what St Antony did, 'his Bishop', he ministered to men the spirit of God and the life of the soul.

### Learning and holiness

Not long after this post of lecturer was accepted by Antony theological schools began to appear in all the provinces of the Order; a famous school was established in our own University of Oxford. There were founded famous chairs where Franciscans and Dominicans rivalled one another in eloquence and learning. Francis himself had no need of learning to find God and bring others to a knowledge of Him, but it was inevitable that his followers, if they were to champion doctrinal teaching, confute heretics, and teach others, had to undertake with zeal ecclesiastical studies. St Francis approved of it, and knew

that men like Antony were not to be distracted by learning. A story is told of Brother Giles, one of the first companions of St Francis, a mystic, a friar who was not too happy over the new trend. Jokingly he asked the renowned St Bonaventure what chance had ignorant men like himself of getting into heaven. "The essential thing for salvation," replied Bonaventure, "is to love God." "But do you mean to say that an uneducated man can love Him as well as clever theologians?" "Not only as well but very much better, and often one sees in this matter old women surpassing the greatest theologians." At that moment a poor old lady was passing along the road, and Giles rushed out into the garden and called out over the hedge, "Rejoice, old soul, for I have just learnt that any old woman can love God better than the Cardinal Bonaventure!"

St Antony knew well what the one essential was. He loved God and in everything sought to do His will. Obeying the call to the religious life he became a Canon Regular but stirrings within him led to his assuming the brown habit of St Francis. 'God wills it' could have been his war-cry. He saw God's will to be best achieved in following the simplicity, humility and poverty of the Poor Man of Assisi. The chief motive for his joining the friars was the desire for martyrdom in foreign lands, but no complaint escaped his lips when he met his first rebuff. Nor did he fret when the friars kept him in the background and gave him humble duties to perform, nor, on the other hand, did he hold back when the same superiors commissioned him to leave the retreat he had grown to love and take on the arduous life of a preacher and missionary in Europe. Backwards and forwards he was sent. And amid all the bustle of his new life there was a serenity springing from his sure grip on the things that matter, a steadfastness which arose from his knowing exactly what he wanted. He was completely subject to his superiors and by doing their will he did God's will. This was more important than his miracles, even though he has been called 'The Wonder Worker'. The miracles did not make him a saint, they were worked because he was already a saint. In his simplicity, humility, obedience and purity he is a model to us all. In St Antony we discern the good religious, the zealous priest, and true child of God, 'The Saint of the World'.

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