

Homily for June 13, 2017

One night, when Saint Anthony was staying with a friend in the city of Padua, his host saw brilliant rays streaming under the door of the Saint's room, and on looking through the keyhole he beheld a little Child of marvellous beauty standing upon a book which lay open upon the table, and clinging with both arms round Anthony's neck. With an ineffable sweetness he watched the tender caresses of the Saint and his wondrous Visitor. At last the Child vanished, and Fra Antonio, opening the door, charged his friend, by the love of Him Whom he had seen, to "tell the vision to no man" as long as he was alive.

Soon afterwards, on June 13, 1231, in his mid-thirties, St. Anthony died. Known as a man who had a great love of the Scriptures, he did in his preaching what the Christ child displayed by standing on the book. St. Anthony showed how all Scripture brings Jesus forth from the Bible.

St Anthony understood what Jesus means when he says that we are to be salt and light. Now think about salt and light, they do not exist themselves, but for something else. In Jesus' time, salt was not valued for itself, but for the way it preserved meat and enhanced the flavor of other foods. Similarly, light isn't meant for itself; rather, we see things by it.

In our rather privatized culture, we tend to think of religion as something for ourselves, but on the Biblical reading, religiosity is like salt and light: it is meant not for oneself, but for others. Perhaps we can bring these two images together by saying we find salvation for ourselves precisely in the measure that we bring God's life to others. We followers of Jesus are meant to be salt, which effectively preserves what is best in the society around us.

We are also light by which people around us come to see what is worth seeing. By the very quality and integrity of our lives, we shed light, illumining what is beautiful and revealing what is ugly. The implication is that, without vibrant Christians, the world is a much worse place.¹

St Anthony was such a vibrant Christian. At his death the voices of children we heard saying: "Our Father, St. Anthony is dead". A year later, in 1232, he was canonized and although his active ministry lasted for only a decade, he has left his mark down through the centuries.

He taught that our words and actions need to be aligned, much like what St. Paul teaches in today's first reading. He writes about how in Jesus all of God's promises find their fulfilment and so he declares all of God's promises find their yes in Jesus. When we allow the word of Christ to dwell in us richly and live as salt and light, then with Anthony and St. Paul we will not be vacillating in our words and actions. Our "yes" will be a "yes" and our "no" a "no". People whose integrity is governed by deepening conversion to Jesus.

¹ Taken from Bishop Baron's daily Gospel reflection

St Anthony understood this and lived it daily. St Anthony of Padua, pray for us, that we too may live with such honesty consistency and so be light and salt.