

A Coffee with Alessio



Saint Anthony and Corpus Christi

This Sunday we celebrate the Solemnity of Corpus Christi and tomorrow (Saturday 13 June) we celebrate the feast of Saint Anthony. I am going to focus on Saint Anthony in this week's column and attempt to tie the two feast days together.

Saint Anthony was born in Lisbon, Portugal in 1195 and died in Padua on 13 June 1231. He joined the Augustinian Order and became a priest and scholar. He then became a Franciscan so that he could do missionary work in North Africa. His work in North Africa was prevented by illness, and a storm then drove his ship to Sicily, so that he found himself taking part in the General Chapter of the Franciscans in 1221, where he met Saint Francis of Assisi himself. He then became a teacher of theology and a very eloquent and popular preacher in southern France and Italy. His preaching led to the conversion of many from heresy, earning him the title "the Hammer of the Heretics."

Saint Anthony is also the patron of lost objects (and people). This is so because he once couldn't find his Psalter but prayed very hard that it would be found. A young novice had taken Anthony's Psalter, but returned it in a hurry when Anthony appeared to him in a vision.

So we can see that Anthony was a very holy man whose whole life was focused on God first, others second and himself last. Anthony didn't let the fact that his plans were turned upside down upset him – he just went where the Lord took him and he met Saint Francis there. If you wish to be a saint, you need to be around saints!

My favourite story about Saint Anthony is the story of the Miracle of the Mule.

One day, a heretic told Anthony that he would believe that Christ was truly present in the Eucharist only if his mule bowed down to it.

So Anthony and the heretic agreed to meet in three days to test the mule. When the time came, Anthony stood to one side with a consecrated host in his hands, while the heretic stood to the other offering the mule some food to eat. The mule's owner starved him for three days thinking he could outsmart the Lord! That was a bad idea to say the

least, because the mule ignored his own hunger and went before the Eucharist and knelt down to adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. So, Anthony converted another person to Christ.

Anthony worked extremely hard to convert the people who didn't believe in Christ, because he pitied them since they were depriving themselves of the most precious gift - the Eucharist. He believed that no one could survive long without spiritual nourishment.

So as we again celebrate Corpus Christi Sunday and acknowledge that the Lord is truly present in His body and Blood which we receive in the Eucharist, let us take Saint Anthony as our model and never deprive ourselves of the opportunity to be in the Lord's presence and not to win souls for Him.

Just as an aside to this column, it's Thursday morning when I'm writing it and the rain is pelting down outside. Two things come to mind – firstly, the words of the Irish Blessing "May the rain fall softly on your fields" and secondly, how in the Eucharist, the water is mixed with the wine at the Offertory. When the priest does this he says inaudibly:

"By the mystery of this water and wine
may we come to share in the divinity of Christ
who humbled Himself to share in our humanity."

Yes, God knows our human weakness and that's why he sent His Son to Jesus to come and live among us, not as an adult, but to be conceived, born and grow up as we all have to do enduring the joys and sorrows of life. We humans come to share in the divinity of Christ by our partaking and reception of the Eucharist. Saint Anthony knew this well, and so did that mule in the story above. Anthony converted the mule's owner to seeing that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist.

We all lose things from time to time and we pray through Saint Anthony's intercession that we find them. Let us also pray for those people who have lost their way in life that not only will they find it, but also find Christ and let Him guide their life – especially those people who respond to violence with violence. Let us also pray for those people who have lost their job especially through COVID-19, and find practical ways to help those people.

Saint Anthony is one of my patron saints so I will definitely have to have a festive coffee and cake this weekend. One idea that comes to mind is the orange cake at Pimlott and Strand. I have mentioned them to you before and I have been trying to go around to my old favourites in the midst of the lockdown and reopening. Just as Anthony had pity on the heretics, I pity the café owners and workers who have had to do it tough over the last few months. Back to my orange muffin, it is a gluten free muffin with orange cream inside. I had one last Sunday and it was a delightful way to finish the weekend.

Till next week, enjoy your coffee and cake!

Mr Alessio Loiacono
Music Field Officer

Friday 12 June 2020

References:

<https://www.santantonio.org/en/content/miracle-mule>

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