

Life

St. Anthony was born in Lisbon, Portugal in 1195. His parents were wealthy nobles. When he was 15 years old, he abandoned everything including his status and joined the St. Augustinian Order, but frequent visits from family and friends obstructed his solitude. After two years, he requested to go to the Coimbra Monastery which was more serene. In the following nine years, he concentrated in studying theology there, and attained in-depth knowledge of the Bible. He was ordained a priest during that time. At the age of 25, five Franciscan friars were martyred in Morocco, and when he saw their bodies returned to Coimbra, he admired them very much and hoped to follow their example of martyrdom. In 1221 he was allowed to be transferred to the Franciscan Order and sent to Africa to preach, but soon he was infected with a serious illness. After a few months on the sick bed, he was called to return home. On the way, strong winds blew the boat to Sicily, so he went on to Assisi to attend a Franciscan conference. He was humble and did not reveal to anyone that he had received long-term training in theology. After the meeting, he was sent to a monastery to perform manual jobs such as cleaning and scrubbing. He humbly accepted it and lived a monastic life of prayer and contemplation. A few months later, after a dinner for ordained priests, the Minister Provincial suggested to find someone to give a speech. No one volunteered, so the superior ordered Anthony to be in charge. Although he was not prepared, he went on the stage. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and delivered an eloquent and moving homily that impressed everyone. When St Francis, the founder of the Franciscan order, learned of this, he sent him to northern Italy to preach the gospel, and serve as the lecturer to teach the seminarians on theology and how to preach to the faithful. From 1224-1227, he was sent to France and after that he returned to Italy.

Heretics abound at that time, and many faithful lost their directions. It was not easy for Anthony to correct the wrong, but according to legend, he went to the city of Rimini, the hotbed of heresy. The townsfolk there decided not to turn up to listened to him. St. Anthony therefore could not complete his mission. After praying, he went near the riverside and began to preach to the fish: since the heretics refused to listen to the Word of God, he would preach to them. Thousands of fish really stuck their heads out of the water and listened. On seeing this miracle, the townsfolk began to listen to his preaching and were persuaded to repent. This legend pointed out that even with the skillful tongue of St. Anthony, without God's help, he could do nothing. St. Anthony had expert knowledge of the scripture and theology, logical and talented in speech, with the help of the Lord, he guided countless lost sheep to return to the right path, and he won the title of "Hammer of Heretics". Because of his excellent holiness, when he preached, each word was a word of wisdom, the Lord also gave him the grace of miracles. Therefore, everywhere he went, multitudes came from everywhere and even shops suspended their businesses temporarily because everyone wanted to listen to him. Pope Gregory IX heard Anthony's homily once, and was amazed that Anthony knew the Bible inside out, calling him "The Ark of the Covenant". Besides preaching, Anthony cared about the poor and often fed the hungry. The people who prayed for his intercession gave food to the poor to thank him, which gradually evolved to today's tradition of "St. Anthony's Bread". Anthony later lived in Padua and was very fruitful in his mission. He died in 1231 at the age of 37. The church proclaimed him a Doctor of the Church with the designation "Doctor of the Gospel." According to legend, when a novice quit his studies, he took away Anthony's precious psalter. He earnestly prayed that the student would return the item. The novice not only returned the lost psalter, but rejoined the order as well. Because of this St. Anthony is regarded as the patron of lost articles.

Reflection

St. Anthony served God whole-heartedly, but his original plans could not be accomplished. He hoped to go to Africa to be a martyr but had to go home because of sickness. He joined the Franciscan Order to preach the gospel but was sent to clean and cook. Although nothing was accomplished as he wished, he never doubted or complained, but gave up his own ideals and followed God's will. Let us learn from St. Anthony who humbled himself, gave up his own ideals, followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and acted according to the Holy will of God.

Prayer

St. Anthony was born in the generation of heresy. God is willing for him to be a "Hammer of Heretics". He was fully capable not only because he was knowledgeable and eloquent, the most important is he loved a prayerful and contemplative life, and had a special intimate relationship with the Lord. When preaching, he was filled with the Holy Spirit that set people's hearts on fire. He once said: "The Secret of the Heart is like a veil that must hang between us and our neighbour ... for Jesus alone is our high priest. All hearts are open to him." Let us learn from St. Anthony to open our hearts to God, unreservedly.

May we learn from St. Anthony, open our hearts unreservedly, and let go of our own opinions in everything, and follow God's will. St. Anthony of Padua, pray for us.