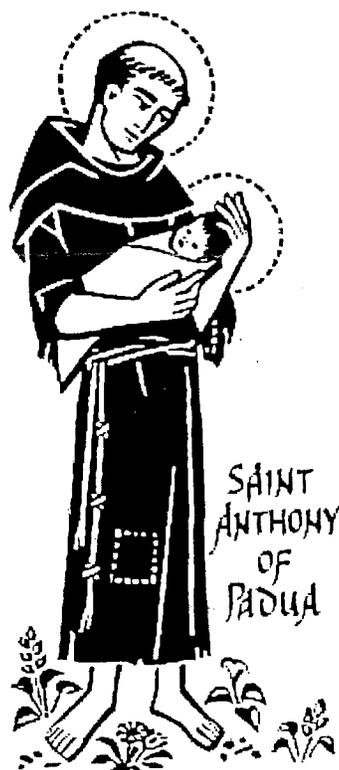


NEWSLETTER

Saint Anthony Shrine of the Sick & Poor
174 Ramsey Street, Paterson
No. 4, February 2021



Dear Friends of St. Anthony,

"Ordinary Time" is the term that our Roman Church uses for the span of time between the end of the Advent-Christmas cycle to the beginning of Lent-Easter cycle. Ordinary Time has stretched through most of January and half of February of this new year of 2021. Yet this Ordinary Time is hardly "ordinary." Still immersed in a global pandemic and still separated from one another by masks and social distancing, we all need to hear the comforting words of St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, "I would like you to be free from anxieties" (7:32).

These days continue to be anxious times. Human communities around the planet struggle to face challenges that have challenged us for decades, as well as crises generated only in the last few years. All of us are trying to press forward in a changed world that is grief-stricken and tear-stained from the loss of loved ones. As followers of Christ, we hold the conviction that, even in the face of grief, our future is bright with promise, yet not without perils, especially for those who experience insecurities caused by limited resources.

Ordinary Time soon shifts into Lent. This holy season that approaches on Ash Wednesday calls us into the wilderness. Yet doesn't it seem that we've all been in a kind of wilderness since the beginning of the pandemic? For almost a year we have all been trying to keep our balance. Hasn't this year of challenge and change made us all hungry and thirsty for all that is lacking? Hasn't this time of international crisis filled us with desires for all that has been but is no longer? We wait to get our old lives back, but will we? Will we ever return to what was? How can we? All of us are significantly changed people. We wait for deliverance; we hope for liberation from this wilderness.

The dominant metaphor that carries the meaning of Lent is "the wilderness." John the Baptist is the person who is identified most closely with the wilderness. On the first Sunday of Lent, Jesus himself goes into the wilderness to wrestle with the powers of darkness. We know the end of the story; we know that Christ's Light triumphs over the darkness. Christ emerges from the desert to offer us "living water" that washes us clean to make of us a new creation in his image.

The goal of forty days of Lent that we move through together is the full celebration of Easter, its "Octave" of Eight Days of Sunday, as well as the following fifty days of the Easter season, all the way to Pentecost Sunday, the word itself meaning "fiftieth" day.

The goal of Lent is to herald the joy of the New Passover at Easter, that Christ is risen from the dead, in death he trampled death, and to those in the graves he gives life!

Peace and good,
Fr. Daniel Grigassy, O.F.M.
Guardian and Pastor

LENTEN PRAYER TO SAINT ANTHONY

O, Saint Anthony, our friar and friend,
once you courageously requested
to be sent out from your own home
to bear witness to Christ's love
in foreign lands.

You were even willing to face martyrdom
for the glory of God!

As I live the days of my own life,
I willingly accept, with your help,
the small daily crosses sent my way
as an act of love to Christ crucified.

Where there is injury, let me pardon.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
When I feel doubt,

let my faith in Jesus
shine through to others.

When I feel despair,
let my hope in his promise
bring that promise to others.

When I feel unloving,
let his love continue to love in me
that I may bring His love to others.



LENT AS AN INVITATION INTO THE WILDERNESS

John the Baptist was good at his job. In fact, he was very good at his job. If you needed someone to be a messenger and prepare a people to turn their hearts, repent, and get right with God, John was the one to call. The voice crying out in the wilderness, the messenger, the baptizer. No matter what you called John, he was the one to go to for a fresh start. Crowds gathered. Scribes were curious. Pharisees plotted. "Prepare the way of the Lord" was the cry of the ancient prophet Isaiah. John embodied that cry. Repent! Be baptized and your sins will be forgiven. The people came from all across the Judean countryside and Jerusalem just to get a glimpse of the would-be messenger in camel hair and leather.

They weren't coming for the locust and honey diet, they were coming to confess. They came into the wilderness to see, to seek repentance. Who doesn't long for forgiveness? Who doesn't want to leave the burdens of the past, the failures, the disappointments, the hurts, and start anew? So, to the wilderness and to the water they came to find John the Baptizer, looking to leave the past behind. A prophet? Maybe Elijah? The Messiah? They had not seen a prophet in a long time. So, they tried to label him, to name him, to categorize him. But John knew who he was and whose he was. He was a messenger, a baptizer, and he was good at his job.

“One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:7-8).

John was not the “One”.

And yet people came. They came to the water and to the wilderness. Longing. Hoping. Expecting. Seeking. Preparing for the “One”. Then he appeared. Jesus of Nazareth. Can anything good come from Nazareth? From the edge of nowhere? From this no-name town? The whispers started as John saw him coming, along with the recognition that today was the day the messenger would greet the message.

Into the water Jesus came. No words were needed because he was the Word. Into the water. Under the water. Up from under the water, dripping wet from the water and in the silence. The promised Holy Spirit descended like a dove. Then the voice, *“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*

Still wet, still dripping, he is driven into the wilderness. Jesus the One, the Word, doesn’t even get to bask in being beloved. The silence is broken by the urgency of the wilderness. No polite invitation, but rather an urgent driving, almost violent force, compels him into the wilderness. The Tempter was waiting.

“Prove yourself,” is the temptation. The Tempter knows that things happen in the wilderness. The wilderness is the mirror, the temptation is to look away. Jesus looks, with the voice of creation still ringing in his ear: *“You are my beloved Son.”* The days turn into night. Night turns into day.

Longing, hoping, praying. Forty days. And then the flutter of wings. The wilderness behind, the work ahead.

If we are honest with ourselves, we try our best to avoid the wilderness. Things happen in the wilderness and we would rather not have things change. The wilderness is where we are forced to see ourselves as we are, without filter or finery. It is there we wander and wait to encounter the Holy. Like Jesus, we are sometimes driven against our will, by the Holy Spirit, to the wild places we would rather not go. But the wilderness is where we as individuals and as community must go, because out of the wild comes new life.

During this Lenten season of fasting and focus, of praying and preparing, we are tempted to simply go through the motions. We are tempted to skirt the wilderness, to turn away from encountering the wild places in our lives and in our world. We are tempted to turn away from the mirror of the Tempter. But if we are to follow Jesus, if we are to be renewed for new possibilities and prepared to hope once more, we must face the wild.

Throughout the history of our salvation, our spiritual ancestors spent time wrestling with the barren places. From the call of Abraham and Sarah to the wandering of the people of Israel for forty years, the wilderness has become a place of refining and self-discovery. But our forbearers never faced the desert alone. For forty years, God journeyed with Israel. For forty days, God watched over Noah. For forty days, God stood with Jesus. And for our time, however long or short it may be, God will stand with us.



If we are honest with ourselves, we know deep down inside that we need the wilderness. We know in our bones and deep within our souls that the desert calls, cajoles, and compels us even when we resist. Our church, our community, our world, now more than ever, needs the wilderness. We need to spend the time looking at ourselves in order to find new life, new ministry, and new ways of being the people of God.

We long for things to stay the same, to be the way they used to be, but God is calling us, like the people of Israel, to a new future. We cannot get to God's future if we are not able to let go of the past.

God has work for us to do and that work begins, like it did with Jesus, when we are driven to the wild places of discovery.

We go to the wilderness to discover anew the joy of being beloved. We go to learn once more what it means to be and live as beloved. We go to listen for the voice of God calling us again. We go to see Christ more clearly in the world around us. We go because that is where we encounter God. We go to the wilderness because we can no longer be as we have always been.

God's work begins with the Holy Spirit sometimes dragging, driving, and drawing us out into the wilderness. Jesus has been there. The angels are there. His footsteps can still be found there. Out in the wilderness, we are faced with many temptations. But the biggest temptation is to not enter the wilderness at all.

The wilderness is calling. "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

PRAYER FOR LOST THINGS

Saint Anthony,
pray for all of us who have lost things
or people precious to us.

Pray for those of us who have lost
our sense of connection and friendship
with God.

Pray for those of us
who have lost loved ones to death.

Pray for those of us
who have lost friends
due to anger or misunderstanding.

Pray for those of us
who have lost our good health
or our peace of mind or spirit.

Pray for us
that we may receive renewed
faith, hope, and love.

Pray for us that lost things
that are needful or helpful
will be found.

If we must continue in our loss,
pray for us that we may receive
Christ's comfort and peace.

THANK YOU for your continuing support of **St. Anthony Shrine for the Sick and Poor** attached to St. Bonaventure Church, Paterson. This **Newsletter** is published three times a year to alert you to our ministry and our prayer for you and your intentions. Let us remain in the peace of Christ!