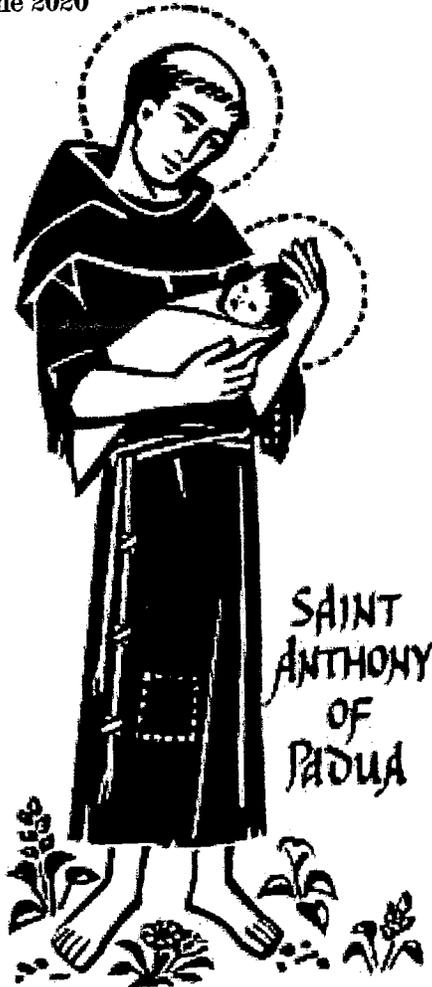


NEWSLETTER

St. Anthony Shrine for the Sick&Poor
174 Ramsey Street, Paterson
No. 2, June 2020



SACRED SOLITUDE

by Fr. Francis McHugh, O.F.M.

Since mid-March during this unusual time when the rhythms of everyday life have been turned upside down, all of us have been experiencing more solitude than we ever imagined. Solitude is usually not something we seek or look forward to, yet there is a great value to solitude that may help us grow spiritually during these remaining days of separation and isolation from others.

To modern ears, the word 'solitude' doesn't sound very positive or inviting. In fact, it can connote loneliness that certainly isn't desired or wanted. As Christians we desire to be with

people; we want to reach out with love and help others in any way we can. So the challenge for us today is to struggle with this directive to shelter in place, to stay home. I'm sure many of us said, "Yuck!" Before this pandemic struck us so fiercely, didn't our culture tell us that we must be out and about? ... to be busy with our "to do" list? Aren't we supposed to be productive? To use it or lose it? It just doesn't seem normal to be "locked inside our homes" unable to circulate and be with others.

As a friar and a parish priest, I can testify that this has been a challenge for me too. We are creatures of habit and to change our routine seems unnatural, right?

Nevertheless, this is the world we live in right now. So how can we make it a positive experience? Well, for most, if not all of us, our starting point should be the Scriptures. As we sit quietly and read the Word of God, we seek a sense of direction for our lives. Now, I admit this is not easy for most of us. However, during these first three months of the pandemic shutdown, we have had the holy season of Lent and then the Easter Season as our backdrop. It became the perfect opportunity for us to reflect on the meaning of the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, we were called more intensely to be people of prayer.

In the Old Testament, there are the beautiful words of the Psalms. As you pray the Psalms, you may notice that in Psalm 46, it clearly says, "Be still and know that I am God!" Then, it continues by saying, "I am exalted among the nations, exalted on the earth." As a young friar, I didn't necessarily understand the importance of these words. As happens to so many of us, I wouldn't allow them to sink into my psyche. It was almost like "in one ear and out the other." But then, while on retreat several years back, the retreat director led several of us in a prayer experience called *meditation*. He used these words as our focus for our prayer in what he called a *mantra*. We had to close our eyes and slowly and softly repeat the phrase, "Be still and know that I am God." As we did so, we were told to break it into segments so we prayed:

“Be still and know that I am God.” Then, a long pause before we said: “Be still and know that I am.” Again a long pause before we continued by praying “Be still and know.” Then, “Be still.” And finally, “Be.” Now, here is the challenge: be still means be silent, be focused. “Be” is an action word!

This retreat director then reminded us to reflect on the lives of the Franciscan Saints. No doubt, some of us have read a life of St. Francis and perhaps a life of St. Clare. However, not many know much about the life of St. Anthony, St. Bonaventure, Blessed John Duns Scotus, or of the early Brothers and Sisters of Penance. All of these Franciscans valued the importance of private meditative prayer or what is called *contemplation*. This is especially true of our Holy Father St. Francis. He needed private times to pray in order to preach as “the herald of the Great King.” For all of these early Franciscans, time spent in quiet prayer was thought of as “Sacred Solitude.”

Perhaps you have had the experience of being on retreat and having quiet time to yourself. My point is that private meditative prayer isn't just for when we are on retreat. In fact, it ought to be a daily occurrence in our lives, just as it was in the lives of the early Christians.

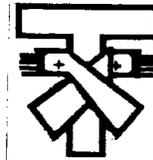
In our Holy Name Province, there is a young friar by the name of Dan Horan who wrote a book over a decade ago entitled “Dating God.” That same year, he synthesized this material for an article in “America” magazine (June 18, 2007 issue). Let me quote from part of that article.

“Being a millennial is an important factor for a person in religious life. We millennials have grown up bombarded by stimuli too varied to count. With satellite television, satellite radio, MP3 players, the Internet and cellular phones, silence is a rarity; and with communication technology always a reach or click away, loneliness can easily be masked. None of these devices or activities is inherently bad; on the contrary, when appropriately used, they are all good and useful. But because of them and our

predisposition to fear solitude, the embracing of solitude can be difficult for a millennial. So when my novice master informed me that I would spend several days in the woods of eastern Pennsylvania on a hermitage experience, apprehension and anxiety soon followed.

If you never spent time with another person, you can hardly describe yourself as being in a relationship with the other. To foster a healthy and meaningful relationship with someone, you must set aside time during which the other person is your focus and presence to each other takes priority. Understandably, such effort can be challenging. With all the distractions of life and the pressures of work and society, it seems sometimes nearly impossible and often improbable that time can be made just to be with another.”

By the time these words in this *Newsletter*, some or many of the restrictions imposed on us during this pandemic may have been lifted. Nevertheless, it might be valuable for many of us to rethink what is “normal” for our average day and how we spend our time. Can “Sacred Solitude” become part of our new normal? I hope so!



HAPPY FEAST DAY, ST. ANTHONY !!!

by Fr. Daniel Grigassy, O.F.M.

The human spirit is never satisfied. We are full of desire; we always want more. Not more material things, not more stuff and clutter, but we yearn for more peace and happiness; we crave joy and blessings. We chase after love and affection. We are filled with desire for fulfillment and integrity. The more we experience them, the more we want to have them for ourselves and for those we love!

The human spirit is never satisfied. This is the nature of the human creature. We are insatiable embodied spirits! And this is a good thing! St. Anthony knew this truth so well, but in his wisdom, he preached these words to tame us and to teach us: *“Do you want to have everything? Give all of yourself and God will give you all of Himself, and thus, not having anything of yourself, you will totally possess God and yourself in Him.”* What beautiful words from the Wonderworker of Padua whose Feast we celebrate on Saturday, June 13th!

Statues or images of St. Anthony with the Christ Child in his arms tell only part of his story. The earliest images of the Saint of Padua show him not with the Infant in his arms but with the Book of the Gospels in his hands. Full of zeal for the Word of God, Anthony wanted only to seek the Lord, to ponder His Word, to live and proclaim His Word.

Friar Thomas of Celano, a contemporary of Friar Anthony, wrote the biographies of St. Francis of Assisi. Thomas wrote that the Lord had opened the mind and heart of St. Francis “that he might understand the Scriptures and speak among the people words about Jesus that were sweeter than syrup or honey from the comb.”

In his zealous preaching, Anthony often played with that image of *honey from the comb*. Testimonies from his own time tell us that he used the behavior of bees in his preaching in the hope that humans might learn from Brother and Sister Bee. Anthony explained that bees gather nectar by going from flower to flower, but only to flowers of the same type. Once we have tasted a particular type of word in the Scriptures, we search for this type of flower throughout the garden of the Old and New Testaments.

As an example of this activity, St. Anthony referred to other images. Consider this one in your own prayer: You’re meditating and praying on Christ the Good Shepherd in the tenth chapter of St. John’s Gospel. You fly from there to Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd,” and then you fly to God’s promise to shepherd His people

in the thirty-fourth chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel. Like a bee, you fly from one similar scripture passage to another, gathering up the sweetness of each word and meaning, and then you sit quietly in prayer to savor its sweetness. This savoring is *meditation*: you take these images to your own depths. There you dwell for a time to experience the Lord’s life living and loving within you. Meditation moves you to *contemplation*: you rest peacefully in God who embraces you and holds you safely, as in a beehive, filled with sweetness and delight in His presence.

Just as the bee keeps the nectar within itself and transforms it into honey, so too with us: *“You who are diligent, whose deeds are many, go to the bee and learn wisdom. ... Gather the Word and place it in the beehive of your memory. You shall remain listening to the Word and shall meditate on the Word. You shall keep it in your heart and memory as a memorial of Jesus Christ.”*

This kind of meditation is the practice of abiding in the Word of God, of lingering there, and drinking in its goodness. Not that we have to ‘do’ anything in prayer; we allow the Word to ‘do’ unto us, to open our whole existence to its power to take hold of us and to transform us!

For the last almost three months we have been praying the *Trezena*, the Italian word that is often used for the thirteen Tuesdays of prayer to St. Anthony of Padua before the celebration of his Feast Day on June 13. The first Tuesday was the Feast of St. Patrick, the day after the doors of St. Bonaventure Church and St. Anthony Shrine were locked. For the past thirteen weeks since the beginning of the pandemic, we have prayed our novena prayers from home. Hopefully you were able to join us online at the live-streamed Mass and Novena on Tuesdays.

Whether at home or online, we heard these words: *“We have turned to St. Anthony of Padua for generations to help us find lost things. In our own day, so much more than objects are lost.”*

words: "We have turned to St. Anthony of Padua for generations to help us find lost things. In our own day, so much more than objects are lost. Loved ones have lost love for each other. Peace has been lost in human hearts, among some people in our own country, and even among nations. Many of our friends and relatives have lost faith and hope. People have been lost in acts of violence, hatred, and natural disasters. And so we ask St Anthony to hear us and interceded for us. May our prayer to the Wonderworker of Padua help us find all that has been lost."

The intentions you brought to this year's Trezena, no doubt, have something to do with finding more than just lost car keys! Lost jobs? Lost businesses? Lost health? Lost integrity? Lost life? The intentions you have carried in your heart do not evaporate into thin air. We gather up all our needs and place them at his feet. They become part of St. Anthony's prayer that he speaks to the Christ Child he embraces.

We celebrate our beloved Saint who made such a mark on this world while walking only thirty-six years on it. We celebrate him who made such a mark on our Franciscan Order while only ten years in it! He was indeed a man who wanted to have everything! He gave all of himself, and God gave him all of Himself. At the end, St. Anthony had nothing of himself, yet he was totally possessed by God and today lives in his sublime light.

On his Feast Day, our beloved saint poses the question to me ... to you: "Do you want to have everything? Give all of yourself and God will give you all of Himself, and thus, not having anything of yourself, you will totally possess God, and yourself in Him."

From the words of St. Anthony

When a crystal
is touched or struck
by the rays of the sun,
it gives forth
brilliant sparks of light.
When the person of faith
is touched
by the light of God's grace,
that person too must give forth
sparks of light
in good words and deeds,
and so
bring God's light to others"

-Sermon #274



THANK YOU for your continuing support of **St. Anthony Shrine for the Sick and Poor.** This **Newsletter** is published four 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!