

St. Anthony of Padua

In many Italian homes (if not all of them) St. Anthony of Padua is one of the most honored of all the saints, at least that was true back in the 1940's and 50's when I was reared. I can always remember a picture and a statue of St. Anthony in my grandparents homes, both paternal and maternal, as well in our own home. In fact, my father had a statue of St. Anthony in his room even while he lived here in Conneaut with me.

St. Anthony was not simply the saint we turned to find lost objects. The roots of my faith and that of both of my parents and siblings go back to St. Anthony of Padua Church in the Brier Hill section of Youngstown. And even though my father was reared in Italy, he actually was born in Brier Hill and didn't return to the little village of Bugnara until he had first been baptized at St. Anthony's.

So, like my parents, my life with St. Anthony began with my baptism at the parish church; actually it was a double baptism, my baptism and that of my cousin, Dan Deramo. Our families were still living in the same household together (and would continue to do so for a few more years until the fifth grandchild was to be born and there just wasn't anymore room in the house!). The pictures of the baptism showed a great time was had by all with plenty of pasta and beer on hand.

Before telling you about St. Anthony, the saint, let me tell you briefly about my church of baptism. I recently looked through a book published by the Youngstown Diocese in 1951 called the *March of the Eucharist* under the direction of the first bishop of the Youngstown Diocese, Bishop James F.

McFadden. *The March of the Eucharist* gives a brief history and a pencil sketch of each of the parishes that were established at that time. St. Anthony of Padua is one of them.

The church was small and the pencil drawing makes it look quite attractive, almost like a wayside chapel. The book states, "The organization of a separate church for the Italian-speaking members of St. Columba and St. Ann was authorized by the Most Reverend Ignatius Horstmann, and the parish of St. Anthony was established in June of 1898. Shortly after its organization, the congregation, aided by Rev. Anthony Petillo ...purchased the structure which was formerly St. Ann, constructed in 1871. Fr. Petillo immediately had it rededicated under the patronage of St. Anthony of Padua."

Thus with this church, my life with God and with the saints formally began.

An amazing fact about St. Anthony of Padua was that he was canonized (declared a saint) less than one year after his death. As I said previously, there is perhaps no more loved and admired saint in the Catholic Church, especially among Italians, than Saint Anthony of Padua, a Doctor of the Church.

Though his work was in Italy, he was born in Portugal in 1195. He first joined the Augustinian Order and then left it and joined the Franciscan Order in 1221, when he was 26 years old.

The reason he became a Franciscan was because of the death of the five Franciscan protomartyrs -- St. Bernard, St. Peter, St. Otho, St. Accursius, and St. Adjutus -- who shed

their blood for the Catholic Faith in the year 1220, in Morocco, in North Africa, and whose headless and mutilated bodies had been brought to St. Anthony's monastery on their way back for burial. St. Anthony became a Franciscan in the hope of shedding his own blood and becoming a martyr. He lived only ten years after joining the Franciscan Order.

So simple and resounding was his teaching of the Catholic Faith, so that the most unlettered and innocent might understand it, that he was made a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius XII in 1946. Saint Anthony was only 36 years old when he died in 1231.

He is called the "hammer of the Heretics." His great protection against their lies and deceits in the matter of Christian doctrine was to utter, simply and innocently, the Holy Name of Mary.

When St. Anthony of Padua found he was preaching the true Gospel of the Catholic Church to heretics who would not listen to him, he then went out and preached it to the fishes. This was not, as liberals and naturalists are trying to say, for the instruction of the fishes, but rather for the glory of God, the delight of the angels, and the easing of his own heart.

St. Anthony wanted to profess the Catholic Faith with his mind and his heart, at every moment.

He is typically depicted with a book and the Infant Child Jesus, to whom He miraculously appeared, and is commonly referred to today as the "finder of lost articles." Upon exhumation, some 336 years after his death, his body was found to be corrupted, yet his tongue was totally incorrupt. And thus it can be said so perfect were the teachings that had been formed upon it.

As I said earlier, my cousin, Dan, and I were baptized together at St. Anthony's. Other baptisms in our family followed: a year later, his sister, Connie, and the following year, my brother, Ed. But by the time the fifth child in a household of ten was to be born, my parents, brother and I moved out to St. Brendan's in Youngstown where my brother, Dan was baptized. But so as not to lose the influence of our favorite patron saint in his life, my mother gave Dan the middle name... yes, you guessed correctly, Anthony! But you also have to keep in mind, Dan was born on June 14, Flag day for all Americans, but for a first generation Italian-American, it was the day after the Feast Day of St. Anthony, June 13!

Today, I still go to St. Anthony's in Brier Hill for the feast day celebration on June 13. Msgr. John DeMarinis, the current pastor of the past 30+ years holds a great Mass celebration, generally with the bishop and many attending clergy and the Oblate Sisters. Of course with any grand celebration there's always a grand feast, at least for the priests that serve the Church and Msgr. DeMarinis is never outdone for a grand dinner for the priest at his rectory.

In days gone by, during the Feast Day Mass celebration, fireworks could be heard going off at the time of the Consecration in tribute to sacredness of the moment and to alert the members of the local community in Brier Hill who could not attend, that a sacred moment was taking place on the day of this great Feast. In those days, following the Mass there was also a grand outdoor festival as we had once done here at St. Mary/St. Frances Cabrini with rides, outdoor food booths, tables of chance, both private indoor games and the more public outdoor ones, Briar Hill pizza, a spaghetti dinner in the parish hall and of course a large monetary raffle.

Today as our Diocesan Church looks at restructuring, I suspect St. Anthony's like the many other ethnic or what we used to call "the nationality" parishes, (more properly called "personal parishes" according to Canon Law today), will eventually become part of one Italian parish (rather than having three in the Youngstown area). The great feast day celebrations and dinners may not continue in the same fashion, but the celebration of Feast of St. Anthony of Padua will continue in the hearts of Italians and non-Italians who have been a part of Briar Hill for years to come.

Happy Feast Day and remember to celebrate your life with the Saints!