

GOD AND SAINT ANTHONY

Over the years I have referenced my Sunday morning prayer list. It began early in my priesthood prompted by people coming up to me and asking me to pray for one of their family members or a particular situation. I would of course say yes and then later on the person would return and thank me for the prayers. In my own mind, often enough, I didn't remember the particular prayer request. Although when they were asking me I would make a mental note to include the particular request in my praying of the Liturgy of the Hours (the Breviary) or in Mass. But then I read about another priest who carried a little spiral pocket notebook and when someone asked for prayers he would write their name and the intention down so he could really pray for them. That made sense to me and so I started to do the same.

So each Sunday morning I open my Prayer List and recite the names of all those who have requested prayer for their intentions or for their loved ones. The list is long now. It takes about 35 minutes just to read each name. I keep the list next to my chair on a small table in the Rectory Chapel. Rarely does it move from that spot. But I do take it with me to the Holy Land and other shrines. It is a very touching thing to sit at Calvary, for instance, inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and recite all those names right where Jesus died.

I lost the list one time and I was really panicked. There had been some mix-up in our room assignment in the hotel and I was in one room for one night and then moved to another room. When I went into my bag to take my prayer list to Calvary it was gone. I looked everywhere. I talked to everyone. I checked and rechecked and rechecked my bags. I called the hotel Lost and Found. Nothing. Then of course I began to pray to Saint Anthony. We all know that Saint Anthony is the saint of choice when you lose something. What many do not know is there is a tradition that is called Saint Anthony Bread. The bread is money. Money for the poor. It is for them to buy food—bread—to feed their families. When you pray to Saint Anthony and he doesn't seem to be coming through offer to give some money for his poor and it is amazing what you will discover. So I typically start at \$5 and pretty quickly move to \$10. But it is not unusual to go to \$25 or even \$50 or on occasion \$100 depending on how important or personally valuable to me is the item lost.

When I lost my Prayer List I got to a hundred pretty fast. And then I went to my knapsack to look again and I took everything out as I had done before. I looked in at the black hard cardboard bottom of the knapsack and then I saw it. This black travel pouch from Springhouse Travel. Completely black on one side and bold yellow logo on the other side. I had transferred it to my knapsack to carry with me to Calvary but I couldn't see it even though it was right there all the time. Isn't that the case often enough in life when we can't see what we seek even though it is right there all the time?

Dear St. Anthony, please come around. Something's been lost and can't be found. St. Anthony's Bread is an expression of devotion reminding of St. Anthony's love for and aid to the

poor when he was alive. The tradition dates back to the 13th century, stemming from a story when a young child fell into a barrel of water and drowned. The mother begged St. Anthony to help, promising to donate the girl's weight in grain for the poor if her daughter was restored. The child arose as if asleep. Thus began the tradition of promising and giving alms to the poor for favors answered through St. Anthony's intercession. The actual name of "St. Anthony's Bread" originated from a the story of a French woman named Louise Bouffier in 1890, who promised loaves of bread for the poor when St. Anthony helped her with opening the broken lock of her small linen shop. After his help, her shop was the basis of St. Anthony's Bread, where she generously fed the poor with loaves of bread in St. Anthony's name.

In modern times, the term "St. Anthony's Bread" often refers merely to the money collected for the poor in St. Anthony's name and there is no actual bread exchanged. The money given to the poor will help them buy food. But at all the Masses this weekend of St. Anthony's feast we are giving out some actual St. Anthony bread for your tables but also as a reminder to pray for Saint Anthony's intercession and to give alms for the poor in his name.

Today is the feast of the Most Holy Trinity. God, our God who spoke to Moses of Himself saying, "God, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, rich in kindness and fidelity." Our God whom St. Paul invokes as "the grace of Jesus Christ, the Love of the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit." Our God whom Saint John says "So loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son so that the world might have eternal life." That is the God in whom we believe. The Trinity.

Why does the Trinity reveal its innermost self to us? Because the Trinity wants us to know the very heart of God, wants us to share in this interior intimacy without overwhelming us. The Trinity desires that we can share in the very life that animates Father, Son and Spirit. God does not desire to condemn this world but to save it from our sins. God does not need our love. But God does indeed want our love. God opens to our love, accepts our love and welcomes our love. Why does our God do this? Because, in the simplest of terms, God is for us! Jesus himself says as much on the night before He dies. Seated with his beloved disciples while breaking bread and asking them to break bread in similar fashion he says so simply "This is my body—for you!" "This is the chalice of my blood—for you! Do this to remember me!"

God's heart is a caring heart. God really is love. So God says: "Love me with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself." Do this and you will live—forever. Saint Anthony got that. He lived that. And one of the ways we show that we are truly living the Way of Christ is by taking care of God's poor. And all poor people are God's poor. So when you receive your loaf of Saint Anthony bread at the end of Mass today be reminded that there is a responsibility to give to the poor not only when we lose something. It is yet another way to give praise to the Most Holy Trinity.