

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In this morning gospel 10 lepers called out to our Lord begging for healing. They were on the outskirts of the village since lepers were not allowed to enter into villages. Nine of these lepers were Jews and the 10th one was a Samaritan.

Jesus told them to go and present themselves to the priests so that the priests could declare them healed of leprosy. This was in accordance with the law of Moses. On the way there they realized that they were healed. One of them, the Samaritan, turned around and went back to Jesus thanking God for healing him. Jesus was disappointed that the others did not give thanks to God for the healing. He pointed out to the people that only this Samaritan gave thanks to God for his healing.

How often do we call out to God asking for healing or for any of the many things that we feel we need? Many times we do not receive what we ask for, since it is not God's will. Too often we think we know God's will and try to tell him what to do, but we should pray "If it is God's will". What we must remember, is that when God does answer our prayers we must give thanks to Him.

One of the greatest gifts that God has given us His Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist. The word Eucharist means Thanksgiving. We must give thanks to God for giving us the food of life. We must give thanks to God for loving us and giving himself for us. We must prepare ourselves to receive the precious Body and Blood of Christ by repenting of our sins. An important aspect of our preparation to receive Holy Communion is to pray the pre-communion prayers which are found in the prayer book. It is also important to pray the prayers of thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion. These too are found in the prayer book.

Today we commemorate St. Anthony the Great. St. Anthony was born in Egypt about the year 250 A.D. His parents were moderately wealthy. They were devout Christian, who attended the services of the Church as often as possible. He showed no reluctance to live the life of the Christian and to attend the services. His parents died when he was about 20. One day, on his way to church, he was contemplating upon how the apostles left all and followed the Christ. He remembered the words and Acts where the early Christians sold their possessions and gave the money to the apostles to give to the poor. As he entered the church, the Gospel was being read. It was the one about Jesus said to the rich man "If thou art willing to be perfect, go and sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come then and come follow Me (Matthew 19:21). Anthony took these words as if God was speaking to him to heart. He was convinced that hearing this Gospel was not just an accident. God was affirming the thoughts that he had had on his way to church that morning.

Anthony went and sold all his possessions which he had inherited from his parents. This brought in a tremendous amount of money. He gave the money away to all those whom he knew were in need. He only kept enough back to care for his younger sister. He arranged for the care of his sister by some women in the village.

Anthony then built a small hutch for himself to live in, not far from the village. At this time there were no monasteries. If anyone wished to live life of an ascetic, they would build a small hutch for themselves in which to live. Anthony knew of a man who lived near a neighboring village and had lived as an ascetic from his youth. He went to him and learned how to live as an ascetic.

Anthony directed all his energy to spiritual practices that he might be a pure offering to God. He also labored with his own hands, for he heard St. Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians say "This we commanded you, that if anyone was not willing to work, neither let him eat." With a small amount from the wages he received, he provided for himself, while the remainder he donated to the poor.

He prayed continually, for again he had heard St. Paul say to the Thessalonians "be praying unceasingly". He also gave all his attention at the reading of the Scriptures. He was continually seeking out other ascetics so that he could learn from them. From observing these men, Anthony learned what was necessary to be holy and embraced the ascetical lifestyle with his entire being.

The devil does not like it when a person attempts to live a holy life. He was continually tempting Anthony with reminders of his previous way of life, of all the good things that he had before he sold all his goods. In order to protect himself Anthony would make the sign of the cross. Anthony continued to strengthen himself, by continually praying and fasting. He knew how important it was to love God with all his strength. Each day he approached the new day as if it was the first day of being a monk, with great zeal to be the best ascetic possible.

When Anthony was about 35 years old, he went out to the sepulchers which were located some distance from the village. The sepulchers were the places where they buried the dead. If you remember when Jesus was buried it was in a sepulcher. Jesus' sepulcher was a cave that they had rolled a stone in front of, these sepulchers were small buildings. Anthony had a friend of his bring him bread to eat. After the friend left, Anthony had him lock the door behind him. Anthony was left alone to pray.

The evil one knew that this would only strengthen Anthony and his relationship with God. One night the evil one came with several of his demons and attacked Anthony beating him mercilessly. The next day Anthony's friend came with bread and discovered him lying on the ground. He thought that Anthony was dead. He carried Anthony's body into the main church in the village. There they prepared to bury him. About midnight Anthony regained consciousness and told his friend to carry him back to the sepulcher and close the door. Inside he began to pray. After praying he called out to the demons taunting them. Telling them, that though they had physically beaten him, nothing would separate him from the love of Christ. This enraged the demons and so they began to attack him again. This time they took on the forms of various wild animals, such as lions, bears, bulls, serpents, and vipers as well as other creatures. There are many icons of St. Anthony showing the demons attacking him in these forms.

This did not frighten Anthony, although the pain was even greater than before. He did not turn his back on Christ. He laughed at the demons telling them they had no power over him. If they had power, it would have been sufficient for only one to attack him. This only enraged the demons more, but they were powerless. After a while, Anthony, looked up at the roof and it appeared to be open and a beam of light was shining through it. He realized that this was a divine visitation by Christ coming to help him. Immediately the demons disappeared, and the pain that Anthony have been experiencing left him.

Anthony thanked our Lord for helping him, and asked him why he had not helped him from the beginning. The Lord told him that he was there but wanted to see how he would endure the fight. Jesus promised to be his assistance and support in times of hardship and distress for the rest of his life and that He would make Anthony's name known throughout the world. After Anthony had heard this, he again arose and prayed. He received such strength that he perceived that he had more power in his body than previously. The following morning, Anthony left the sepulcher. He went forth with even greater love for God and an increased zeal and commitment.

That day Anthony approached the ascetic that lived on the outskirts of the village who had helped him begin his journey as an ascetic. He asked the elder to go with him into the desert. The elder refused to go with him saying that he was old and infirmed. Also, there was no custom of monks living in the desert. Instead of trying to pressure him into going into the desert, Anthony prayed with him asking God to bless his path.

Afterwards, Anthony went alone into the desert. As he traveled into the desert Anthony became tired. The evil one seeing this tempted Anthony by making it appear that there was a silver plate lying in the road. Anthony realized that this was the devil tempting him to pick up the plate and take it for his own. When Anthony refused to take the plate it disappeared in a puff of smoke. As Anthony went further he saw a large quantity of gold lying on the road. Realizing that this was another temptation, he avoided it as if it were fire. He said a prayer and made the sign of the cross. He then continued his journey not giving into the temptation of wealth since he had vowed to live in poverty.

Soon he came to some mountains where he discovered a deserted and ancient fortress on the far side of a river. Anthony decided to live there. He barricaded up the door with stones and lived within it. His friends would bring him bread to eat, which they pass through an opening in the roof. Anthony remained constantly in prayer during this time. One time his friends heard voices coming from the fortress. To them it sounded as if it was demons attacking Anthony. They cried out to Anthony he told them not to be afraid. The demons had no power and would not harm them. They were to make the sign of the cross and to return to their homes. Although Anthony struggled with the demons often he was not wearied by the struggle. Rather he gained strength and courage through heavenly visions and thus defeated his foes.

When, after 20 years, his friends and those needing healing came to him. They cried out to him, but he did not answer them. Fearing the worst, his friends tore the door down. Anthony finally

left the fortress for the first time since he entered it. To the wonder of all, he appeared as if an angel of light. He was in perfect health, though he had fasted far more than most people thought was possible.

Throughout Anthony's life, God worked many miracles through him. He cast out demons, he healed those who were ill and suffered various diseases. His tears brought water from the ground in the middle of the desert. He foretold the arrival of those coming to see him by revelation from God. He was made aware of the passing of ascetics, although they were far away from him.

Anthony was very firm in the Orthodox faith. He completely rejected the teachings of Arius. One time the Arians falsely declared that Anthony held their beliefs. He left the holy mountain and went into Alexandria and denounced the heretics, declaring the true faith. When he left Alexandria to return to the mountain, St. Athanasios (who was one of the great defenders of Orthodoxy against the Arians) was walking with him. As they approached the gate of the city, a woman ran up to Anthony and begged him to heal her daughter and to cast the demon out of her. The child was placed on the ground and Anthony prayed to God for the child and the child was healed and the demons were cast out.

When Anthony was 105 years old God revealed to him that he would soon leave this world.

He called his closest disciples to him and gave them warnings as to things to come. He exhorted them to have nothing to do with the Arians or any other heretics. He did not want to have his body cared for in the customs of the Egyptians. They did not bury the bodies of holy people, instead they placed them upon a couch and kept them in their houses. He desired to be buried underground. Immediately, upon his death, his disciples prepared his body to be buried underground, which they did. To this day, no one knows where his body was buried.

St. Anthony was a man who turned from the riches of this world to seeking the riches of God. Although we may not be called to live in the desert as Anthony was, or to be an ascetic as he was, we are all called to live holy lives. We must pray, we must fast, we must turn our backs on all sin. Take time to read the life of St. Anthony and learn from him. He was a humble man who sought but one thing, to be holy.

Through the prayers of the holy father Anthony, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy. Amen.