

The Unlikely Journey of Friar Anthony: How a Thirteenth-Century Friar Became America's Most Popular Saint

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: Friar Anthony of Padua, Saint Anthony, Franciscan friar, patron saint of lost things, miracles of Saint Anthony



St. Francis of America: How a Thirteenth-Century Friar Became America's Most Popular Saint by Patricia Appelbaum

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: Summary:** In this article, Dr. Emily A. Coleman explores the fascinating life of Friar Anthony of Padua (1195-1231), a Franciscan friar who became one of the most popular saints in America. Drawing from historical sources and contemporary accounts, Coleman traces Anthony's humble beginnings in Lisbon, Portugal, to his remarkable rise as a charismatic preacher and miracle worker. She examines the factors that contributed to Anthony's enduring popularity, including his association with

lost things, children, and the poor, and discusses the ways in which his legacy has shaped American culture.

Among the countless saints venerated in the Catholic Church, Friar Anthony of Padua stands out as one of the most beloved and popular. Known for his miracles, his devotion to the poor, and his charming personality, Anthony has captured the hearts of Americans for centuries. But how did a thirteenth-century friar from Portugal become such an iconic figure in a country founded on religious freedom and separation of church and state? In this article, we will explore the unlikely journey of Friar Anthony, from his humble beginnings to his enduring legacy as America's most popular saint.

Early Life and Vocation

Anthony was born Fernando Martins de Bulhões in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1195. His wealthy family destined him for a career in the Church, and he received a solid education in theology and philosophy. However, at the age of 25, Anthony's life took an unexpected turn. Inspired by the example of the Franciscan friars, who had recently arrived in Lisbon, he renounced his inheritance and joined their order. Taking the name Anthony, he dedicated himself to a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience.



Charismatic Preacher and Miracle Worker

Anthony quickly gained a reputation as a gifted preacher. His sermons, delivered with passion and eloquence, drew large crowds wherever he went. People were captivated by his simple yet profound message of love, forgiveness, and charity. Anthony's preaching had a transformative effect on many, leading to conversions, reconciliations, and a renewed commitment to the Christian faith.

In addition to his preaching, Anthony became known for his extraordinary miracles. He is said to have spoken to animals, healed the sick, and raised the dead. One of the most famous miracles attributed to Anthony is the restoration of a stolen chalice. According to the legend, a thief stole a chalice from a church in Italy. Anthony confronted the thief and ordered him to return it. The thief refused, but as he tried to flee, his hands became paralyzed, and he was forced to drop the chalice. Anthony's miracles further enhanced his reputation as a holy man and contributed to his growing popularity.

Patron Saint of Lost Things

One of the most enduring associations with Saint Anthony is his patronage of lost things. The origin of this association is unclear, but it is believed that it originated in the thirteenth century. According to one story, Anthony lost an important book of psalms. He prayed to God for help, and the book was miraculously returned to him. This story spread quickly, and people began to invoke Anthony's intercession when they lost something valuable.

Over the centuries, Saint Anthony has become the patron saint of lost things, both physical and spiritual. People pray to him to find lost keys, wallets, and other objects, but they also ask for his help in finding lost hope, faith, and meaning in their lives.

Devotion to the Poor and Children

Saint Anthony had a special love for the poor and children. He often preached against the evils of poverty and injustice, and he dedicated himself to helping those in need. Anthony founded several orphanages and hospitals, and he personally cared for the sick and the marginalized. His

compassion and generosity left a lasting legacy, and many charitable organizations today bear his name.

Anthony also had a special affinity for children. He is often depicted in art holding the infant Jesus, and he is known for his gentle and loving nature towards young people. Anthony's devotion to children has made him a popular figure among families, and many parents pray to him for the protection and well-being of their children.

Legacy in America

Saint Anthony's popularity quickly spread from Europe to the Americas. Catholic immigrants brought their devotion to Anthony with them, and he soon became one of the most beloved saints in the United States. In 1946, Pope Pius XII proclaimed Anthony the patron saint of the United States. Today, there are countless churches, schools, and hospitals dedicated to Saint Anthony in America. His image can be found in homes, businesses, and even on the cover of magazines.

Saint Anthony's enduring popularity in America is due to a combination of factors. His association with lost things, his devotion to the poor and children, and his miraculous intercession have all contributed to his enduring appeal. Anthony represents the values of compassion, generosity, and hope, which resonate with people of all backgrounds.

The journey of Friar Anthony from a humble friar in thirteenth-century Portugal to the most popular saint in America is a testament to the power of faith, love, and miracles. Anthony's life and legacy continue to inspire people today, and his intercession is sought by millions worldwide. As the

patron saint of lost things, the poor, and children, Saint Anthony remains a symbol of hope, compassion, and the enduring power of the human spirit.



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