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Message for BBNeighbourhoods
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My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Next Sunday, 13 June, is the feast of Saint Anthony of Padua. He is my baptismal Patron Saint, and on my recent round of parishes for the conferral of the sacrament of Confirmation, I have discovered that he is the Confirmation Patron Saint of many of our young boys and girls. Because his feast lands on a Sunday this year, we will not be celebrating him in the liturgy, so I thought that I might reflect upon this great Saint in BB Neighbourhoods today.

In Rome not far from where I used to live, there is a beautiful church which is totally Baroque in style. This church is the Portuguese national church in Rome and is known as Sant'Antonio dei Portoghesi (Saint Anthony of the Portuguese). It is, in fact, dedicated to Saint Anthony of Lisbon or as most of the world knows him, Saint Anthony of Padua.

The Portuguese are quite protective of their man who was born in Lisbon in the year 1195. He was the eldest son of an influential family and was baptised Ferdinand. His parents had great plans for him. Accordingly, they provided him with a sound education as they nudged him towards an ecclesiastical or bureaucratic career. Without a doubt he would initially have studied Arts and then pursued Theology and Law.

His parents were to be disappointed however, not due to any failure or laziness on his part, rather because he chose not to follow their dreams for him. Instead, at the age of fifteen, he left home and began the great pilgrimage of faith which led him to the priesthood at 25 years of age.

Saint Anthony is so often remembered for pious reasons, and yet I suspect that the real sanctity of the man lies in his love and devotion to the Word of God.

He travelled through Northern Italy and Southern France, preaching especially in the areas which had been plagued by heresy. He combated both political and moral abuses in the Church as well as the rejection of Church authority and doctrine. I expect that his most powerful weapon against these enemies was his evangelical lifestyle. By living what he preached, he was able to confound heretics and edify the faithful.

Saint Anthony was also renowned as a confessor and minister of reconciliation between peoples. His example of love and acceptance itself became a powerful call to conversion.

One final glimpse at this holy pastor and doctor of the Church will show that he was a man of integrity who defended those who were powerless and incapable of defending themselves. He took to himself the proclamation of the dignity of every person some 700 years before the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council stated their intention “to develop the doctrine of recent popes on the inviolable rights of the human person” (*Dignitatis humanae, I*) – a theme which was very close to the heart of Saint John Paul II.

On 13 June 1231, at the age of 36, Saint Anthony gave his final homily. He had travelled thousands of kilometres on his mission, and he had preached to tens of thousands of the faithful.

Saint Anthony is remembered for many reasons, for some it is as the patron saint of the lost, for others he is remembered for good health, for some as one who helps with their faith, and still others as an inspiration for hope. I offer you Saint Anthony as a great saint because he gave his life to the proclamation of the Word of God. He is a saint who can inspire us, clergy and people, the community of the Church of Broken Bay.

Saint Anthony of Padua, pray for us!

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