

Homily – Solemnity of St. Anthony of Padua – June 13, 2021

Saints are always admired, but not often understood and rarely imitated. At least let us leave today with the resolution to imitate the virtues of our patron, Saint Anthony of Padua.

In the first reading, we heard the prophetic words that would be fulfilled upon Jesus reading them in the synagogue: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me...” Anointing has an ancient symbolic meaning. After a good harvest and hard work, oil was obtained from olives and it would serve different purposes. First of all, it is a sign of abundance and joy. It was used to cleanse, to make wrestlers slippery and agile; to soothe wounds and bruises helping them heal, to beautify, season, preserve, strengthen and mark. Essential oils were also used as perfume. That is why kings and prophets were anointed. But as much as oil marks and remains, it ultimately goes away.

The word in Greek for anointing is “chrism,” and that is why it is used to designate the ultimate Anointed One: the Christ, Jesus Our Lord. His anointment is eternal because it is not symbolic, it is different. He has been anointed by the Father with the Holy Spirit.

The Lord passed that anointment on to the Apostles and through them to the Church. And for all of these reasons, the anointment in the sacraments is a sign of the Holy Spirit, sharing in the same anointment that Jesus received. The signs that someone has received the anointment of the Holy Spirit are the works of the Anointed One, the works of the Lord: bringing good news to the afflicted, binding up the brokenhearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, announcing the Kingdom of God, comforting all who mourn.

In the second reading, Saint Paul stands before the king and bears witness of his faith with a courage that is above and beyond human strength. Saint Anthony of Padua was a brilliant theologian and preacher, but his zeal burnt him from within and he wanted to be a witness. He wanted to fulfill the call that we just heard in today’s gospel, like the followers of St. Francis. He

also wanted to be sent to Morocco, to die as a martyr, and that was his condition to join the Franciscan order. But after he had made his vow of obedience and was sent to Padua, he understood that it was the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through his superiors and he followed unhesitatingly. When no one wanted to listen to him, he went on to preach to the fish. In contemplation he asked Our Lady for permission to carry her Baby for a little while. She said not for a little while, but forever, and now we see him depicted carrying Baby Jesus. Perhaps the most eloquent sign of his anointment was the gift of piety, which led him to exude a contagious love for God and neighbor.

The founders of this town could have named it after the appearance of the landscape, or something related to themselves. But the first ones to arrive celebrated a Mass and named the river after the saint of the day, Saint Anthony of Padua. The ones who finally established the first mission felt a connection to a spiritual seed planted decades earlier, and decided to honor the heritage of those who came before and of that great saint from their own religious order.

All these are signs of anointment to which we are called to witness. The need is enormous; we know it! And the laborers are few because the call is not to an easy task. As a matter of fact, God does not give easy calls. But Pope Francis has reminded us that “everything ‘depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy’ (Rom 9:16) and that ‘he first loved us’ (cf. 1 Jn 4:19).” We must keep asking the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. And we must go on our way “like lambs among wolves,” aware that we are protected and strengthened by our anointment. We need nothing more than the anointment of the Holy Spirit.

Blessed Mother of Guadalupe, help us follow in the footsteps of Saint Anthony and the missionaries who founded our beloved Archdiocese. Help us believe with all our heart that the kingdom of God is truly at hand. Make us a faithful anointed people, imitators of your Son, Jesus, the Christ.