

ANTHONY/ANTONY

Abbot & Monastic Founder, d. 356

Feast Day: 17 January

Collect: O God, by your Holy Spirit you enabled your servant Anthony to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil: Give us grace, with pure hearts and minds, to follow you, the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Facts:

- Founder of Christian monasticism
- Born in Egypt, parents were Christians
- When his parents died, he and his sister had to manage their wealth and property
- Heard the story of the Rich Young Ruler whom Jesus told to sell everything he had and give it to the poor—Anthony immediately gave his parents' property to the townspeople, sold most of his goods, and gave the money away
- Following Jesus' quote, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow," took his remaining funds to set up his sister in a women's home, and became an anchorite (solitary ascetic)
- Famous for being tormented by demons and devils that appeared in a variety of forms
- Lived alone in caves in the mountains near the Nile River for 20 years, then left his cave and founded the first monastery, community of linked ascetics
- Athanasius says of the monastery: "Their cells like tents were filled with singing, fasting, praying, and working that they might give alms, and having love and peace with one another."
- Encouraged those being martyred, combatted Arianism
- Left a goat-skin tunic and a cloak to Athanasius when he died

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- When Christianity was legalized by the Edict of Milan in 313 by Constantine, some Christians wanted a way to prove their virtue, and martyrdom by the state was no longer happening
- So they moved to the desert to enact their own martyrdom: self-scrutiny, discipline and asceticism leading to liberation into more pure love of God and neighbor
- Mirroring of Christ's temptations in the wilderness
- Essential elements of early monasticism
 - Withdrawal from the world
 - Chastity
 - Abstinence from worldly/bodily comforts
 - Unceasing prayer
 - Manual labor
- For early monastics, solitude was a driving force: the word "monk" comes from "monachos" rooted in the Greek "monos" meaning "one"
- Soon their holiness draws people to the desert to spend time with them (which they're usually mad about), and monastic communities begin

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- What is the value of solitude in the spiritual life?
- What is the value of self-denial in the spiritual life? Why did they value it so highly and we value it so little?
- When have you practiced asceticism in your life? What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about God?
- Does this level of total commitment and self-giving seem alien to you? Why or why not? What do you pursue in your life with this kind of passion? What are you willing to give up for more intimacy with God? How could you pray about this?

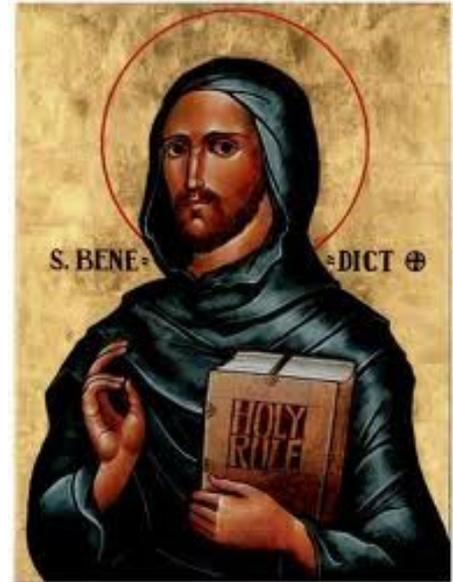
My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics:

BENEDICT

Monk & Monastic Founder, ca. 480-540

Feast Day: 11 July

Collect: Almighty and everlasting God, your precepts are the wisdom of a loving Father: Give us grace, following the teaching and example of your servant Benedict, to walk with loving and willing hearts in the school of the Lord's service; let your ears be open to our prayers; and prosper with your blessing the work of our hands; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Facts:

- Educated in Rome during a time of major political instability and invasion by “barbarian” kingdoms—fall of the Empire
- Hated Rome and its customs and immorality so much he moved out to a cave on a hillside forty miles west of Rome
- People followed him out to the wilderness as his reputation of holiness spread, they moved to Monte Cassino ca. 525 or 530
- Composed his rule of life in 540, now known as *The Rule of St. Benedict*, foundational document of all subsequent monasticism
- Threw himself in a thorn bush to extinguish his passion for a woman, declared himself afterward free of the vice of sexual temptation
- Monks who hated his imposition of real discipline on their community poisoned his wine. He blessed the glass with the sign of the Cross and it immediately shattered—“it could not bear the sign of life”
- Priest sent 7 naked girls to dance in front of his house to tempt him, Benedict moved houses and a terrace the jealous priest was standing on collapsed and he was killed—Benedict wept

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Formalized the three monastic vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience
- Added the Benedictine Vows: Stability, Obedience, and Conversion of Life
- Others were drawn to Benedict and other early monastics by their intellectual humility combined with devastating perceptiveness (John 4:29)
- The monastic orders became over time a draw for people who felt the mainstream church was corrupt, lukewarm, or misguided—sought a deeper commitment
- His *Rule* seems austere to modern eyes, but was actually very humane compared to some desert practices: daily schedule was 4 hours in liturgical prayer (the Hours), 5 hours of spiritual reading, 6 hours of work, 1 hour for eating, and 8 hours of sleep
- Motto of *Ora et labora*, pray and work
- The Hours:
 - Matins: sunrise
 - Lauds/Prime: 1st hour, 6 a.m.
 - Terce: 3rd hour, 9 a.m.
 - Sext: 6th hour, noon
 - None: 9th hour, 3 p.m.
 - Vespers: sunset
 - Compline: before bed
 - (Vigils: middle of the night)

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- Where do you see Benedict's vows at work in your life? What do they mean for us as non-monastics? (Poverty, chastity, obedience, stability, conversion of life)
- Is it possible to pray without ceasing? What does that look like?
- What is the value of stable spiritual community? How can you help build it in your environment?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics:

FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Friar & Mystic, 1182-1226

Feast Day: 4 October

Collect: Most high, omnipotent, good Lord, grant your people grace to renounce gladly the vanities of this world; that, following the way of blessed Francis, we may for love of you delight in your whole creation with perfectness of joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Facts:

- Born in 1182, son of a wealthy merchant in Assisi
- Raised hell as a young man, joined the army and achieved exactly zero military glory—experience of combat was a key step in his spiritual development
- Interacting with beggars and lepers changed his values completely, and he devoted himself to Lady Poverty
- To his father's dismayed anger, he completely rejected materialism and committed himself to the poor, going so far as to strip naked as he left his father's house to show his total departure from his former life
- Founded the Order of Friars Minor (Little Brothers)—they were to observe strict material poverty and live as mendicants (beggars), and never get ordained as priests since that would give them wealth and power
- He lost control of the Order by 1221—the rule was unattainable for many friars who loved Francis' holiness but could not sustain his joyful absolute poverty
- Spiritual partnership and mystical marriage with St. Clare
- Received stigmata not long before his death—marks of Christ's wounds on his own hands, feet, and side
- Most popular and admired of the saints, but least emulated

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Known for his love of creation and the natural world, but this had keen and piercing edge to it not often seen in the yard statues and pet blessings of today. Francis preached to the birds because people weren't listening to him and his message—he felt the animals lived the gospel better than people, and he wanted the world to know it!
- Visited Egypt during the 5th Crusade, and forever afterward taught his monks that they were never to try and convert a Muslim to Christianity, in fact, if they found a Qur'an, they should lay it on the altar with respect
- Committed to literally living as Christ lived in the gospels, and came closer to it than perhaps anyone else
- His love for the earth and nature has been a major source of modern ecological theology—he believed that all creation should praise God and human beings are stewards of making that praise possible
- Proceeding from Francis' ethos of "original blessedness" (although he did not call it that) coexisting with original sin, Franciscans have traditionally had a much more positive anthropology and never subscribed to substitutionary atonement theory to describe Jesus' work on the Cross (called "alternative orthodoxy" by Richard Rohr, a Franciscan)

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- What is the role of poverty in your life? What do you make of Jesus' many teachings on the poor and poverty? What is preventing you from exploring poverty more deeply in your life?
- What is your theology of ecology, or your sense of the spirituality of the care of creation? How do you live it out?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics: