

Pope: the cross enriches the meaning of life

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ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA, AN EXAMPLE TO PREACHERS

VATICAN CITY, 10 FEB 2010 (VIS) -

Benedict XVI dedicated his catechesis during this morning's general audience to St. Anthony of Padua, "one of the most popular saints of the Catholic Church".

St. Anthony was born to a noble family in Lisbon around the year 1195. Following a period spent with the Augustinian Canons, he entered the Friars Minor in the hope of travelling to Morocco to work as a missionary. However he fell sick and returned to Italy where he dedicated himself to intense and effective apostolic labours. He died in Padua in 1231 and was canonised by Pope Gregory IX in 1232.

"Anthony", the Pope explained, "made a significant contribution to the development of Franciscan spirituality with his outstanding gifts of intelligence, balance, apostolic zeal and, especially, mystic fervour. ... He was also one of the first, if not the first, master of theology among the Friars Minor".

The saint wrote two cycles of sermons, one entitled "Sunday Sermons" the other "Sermons on the Saints", in which he presented "a true itinerary of Christian life. Such is the wealth of spiritual teachings contained in the 'Sermons' that in 1946 Venerable Pope Pius XII proclaimed Anthony a Doctor of the Church, giving him the title of 'Doctor Evangelicus' because all the freshness and beauty of the Gospel emerges in his writings", said the Holy Father.

Anthony of Padua, or of Lisbon as he is also known, defined prayer "as a relationship of love, which leads man to a dialogue with the Lord", and he described four "attitudes" which must characterise it: "trustingly opening our hearts to God, affectionately conversing with Him, presenting Him our needs, and giving Him praise and thanks. In this teaching of St. Anthony", the Pope explained, "we see one of the specific traits of Franciscan theology; ... that is, the

central role of divine love which enters the sphere of the affections, of the will, of the heart, and which is the source of a spiritual knowledge that surpasses all other knowledge".

But the "Doctor Evangelicus" also knew the defects of human nature, such as "the tendency to fall into sin, and so he continually exhorted people to combat the inclination to avarice, pride and impurity. ... At the beginning of the thirteenth century, in a context of expanding cities and flourishing trade, a growing number of people were insensitive to the needs of the poor. For this reason, Anthony frequently invited the faithful to turn their thoughts to true wealth, that of the heart" and to seek the friendship of those most in need.

"Is this not", the Pope asked, "also an important lesson for us today, as the financial crisis and serious economic imbalances impoverish many people, and create situations of distress?" He then went on to comment on one another aspect of Franciscan theology, Christocentrism, which "invites us to contemplate the mysteries of the Lord's humanity", especially His Nativity and Crucifixion.

"The vision of the crucified Lord", said the Holy Father, inspired in Anthony "feelings of recognition towards God and of respect for the dignity of the human person". In that vision "everyone, believers and non-believers, may find a meaning that enriches life". This, he explained, "is the importance of the crucifixion in our culture and our humanity, which are born of the Christian faith, ... because God considers us so important as to be worthy of His suffering".

The Pope concluded his catechesis by calling on St. Anthony to intercede for the whole Church, and in particular for "those who dedicate their lives to preaching. Drawing inspiration from his example, may they unite sound and healthy doctrine, sincere and fervent piety, and incisive communication. In this Year for Priests, let us pray that priests and deacons eagerly carry out their ministry of announcing and contextualising the Word of God for the faithful, especially in liturgical homilies".