

**Readings:** *Isaiah 61: 1 – 3; Psalm 88 (89): 2 – 5, 21,22,25,27; Luke 10: 1 – 9.*

Today's saint was born of a noble family in Lisbon in AD 1135 and at his baptism was given the name Fernando. In his mid-teens he joined the Augustinian Canons and spent eight years in prayer and study of the scriptures at their priory of the Holy Cross in Coimbra,

When he was about twenty-five some Franciscan friars (whose order had been founded eleven years earlier) settled in a hermitage dedicated to S. Antony of Egypt. Fernando was attracted to their way of life, particularly when the relics of five Franciscans who had been martyred in Morocco were brought to Coimbra. He obtained permission to become a Franciscan friar, taking the name Antony, and was sent to continue the work in Morocco.

Soon after arriving in Morocco he became ill and was sent home. His ship was blown off course and landed in Sicily, where he learned that a General Chapter of Franciscans was to be held in Assisi. At this chapter he met Francis, the founder, and was moved by his humility.

He was sent to the friary in Forli in Northern Italy, where his ability as a scholar and teacher was discovered when he was asked at short notice to preach at an ordination. This led to his being sent to preach and teach over a wide area. He was also appointed as lecturer in theology to the friars in Bologna and Padua. Francis, who had always been concerned that academic study might distract his friars from their commitment to poverty, recognized Antony as a kindred spirit, and in 1224 wrote to him: *I am well pleased that you should read sacred theology to the friars, provided that such study does not quench the spirit of holy prayer and devotion.*

For the remainder of his life Antony was faithful to this requirement of the founder of the Franciscans. He was sent on a preaching tour to the South of France to oppose the heretical way of life of the Albigensians, but, when Francis died in 1226, he was recalled and acted as Provincial in Northern Italy, with his base in Padua. In the disputes within the Franciscan brotherhood which followed the founder's death Antony was a firm defender of the commitment of Saint Francis to poverty, but without abandoning the need for serious biblical and theological study.

Antony died on June 13<sup>th</sup> 1231 and was canonized within the year. His body was later enshrined in the church, now known as *Il Santo*, in Padua. He was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1946.