

## 21// OF THE LIFE OF ST. ANTHONY

**S**t. Anthony was born in Egypt of good and religious father and mother, and when he was but twenty years old, he heard on a time in the church read in the gospel, that said: If thou wilt be perfect go sell all that thou hast and give it to poor men; and then according thereto he sold all that he had, and gave it to the poor people and became an hermit.

### THE TEMPTATIONS OF ST. ANTHONY

**H**e had overmany temptations of the devil. Then on a time when he had overcome the spirit of fornication which tempted him therein by the virtue of his faith, the devil came to him in the form of a little child all black, and fell down at his feet and confessed that he was the devil of fornication, which St. Anthony had desired and prayed to see him, for to know him that so tempted young people. Then said St. Anthony: Sith I have perceived that thou art so foul a thing I shall never doubt thee.

*Anthony is said of Ana, which is as much to say as high, and tenens that is holding, which is as much as to say as holding high things and despising the world. He despised the world and said: It is deceiving, transitory and bitter, and Athanasius wrote his life.*

### The Devils in the Cave

After, he went into a hole or cave to hide him, and anon he found there a great multitude of devils, that so much beat him that his servant bare him upon his shoulders in to his house as he had been dead. When the other hermits were assembled and wept his death, and would have done his service, suddenly St. Anthony revived and made his servant to bear him into the pit again where the devils had so evil beaten him, and began to summon the devils again, which had beaten him, to battles.

And anon they came in form of divers beasts wild and savage, of whom that one howled, another siffled, and another cried, and another brayed and assailed St. Anthony, that one with the horns, the others with their teeth, and the others with their paws and ongles, and disturned, and all to-rent his body that he supposed well to die.

Then came a clear brightness, and all the beasts fled away, and St. Anthony understood that in this great light our Lord came, and he said twice: Who art thou?

The good Jesu answered: I am here, Anthony.

Then said St. Anthony: O good Jesu! where hast thou been so long? why wert thou not here with me at the beginning to help me and to heal my wounds?

Then our Lord said: I was here but I would see and abide to see thy battle, and because thou hast manly fought and well maintained thy battle, I shall make thy name to be spread through all the world.

### St. Anthony's Desire for Martyrdom

St. Anthony was of so great fervour and burning love to God, that when Maximus, the emperor, slew and martyred Christian men, he followed the martyrs that he might be a martyr with them and deserve it, and was sorry that martyrdom was not given to him.

### The Platter of Silver

After this, as St. Anthony went in desert he found a platter of silver in his way; then he thought whence this platter should come, seeing it was in no way for any man to pass, and also if it had fallen from any man he should have heard it sound in the falling. Then said he well that the devil had laid it there for to tempt him, and said: Ha! devil, thou weenest to tempt me and deceive me, but it shall not be in thy power. Then the platter vanished away as a little smoke.

### The Mass of Gold

And in likewise it happed him of a mass of gold that he found in this way, which the devil had cast for to deceive him, which he took and cast it into the fire and anon it vanished away.

### The World Full of Snares

After, it happed that St. Anthony on a time was in prayer, and saw in a vision all the world full of snares and gins. Then cried St. Anthony and said: O good Lord, who may escape from these snares? And a voice said to him: Very humility shall escape them without more.

### The Devils Accuse Him

When St. Anthony on a time was left in the air, the devils came against him and laid to him all the evils that he had done from his childhood, tofore the angels. Then said the angels: Thou oughtest not to tell the evils that have been defeated, but say if thou know any evil sith he was made a monk, then the devils contrived many evils, and when they might not prove them, the angels bare him higher than tofore, and after set him again in his place.

### The Man Who Vaunted Himself

St. Anthony recordeth of himself that he had seen a man so great and so high that he vaunted himself to be the virtue and the providence of God, and said to me: Demand of me what thou wilt and I shall give it to thee. And I spit in the midst of his visage, and anon I armed me with the sign of the cross, and ran upon him, and anon he vanished away.

## The Devil Destroyed and Come to Naught

And after this the devil appeared to him in so great a stature that he touched the heaven, and when St. Anthony had demanded him what he was, he answered: I am the devil and demand thee why these monks and these cursed Christian men do me thus much shame?

St. Anthony said: They do it by good right, for thou dost to them the worst thou canst.

And the devil answered: I do to them none harm, but they trouble each other, I am destroyed and come to naught because that Jesu Christ reigneth over all.

## SAYINGS OF ST. ANTHONY

### The Young Man with the Bow

A young man passed by St. Anthony and his bow in his hand, and beheld how St. Anthony played with his fellows, and was evil apaid. Then St. Anthony said to him that he should bend his bow, and so he did, and shot two or three shots tofore him, and anon he unbent his bow. Then demanded him St. Anthony why he held not his bow bent. And he answered that it should then be over weak and feeble; then said to him St. Anthony: In likewise play the monks, for to be after more strong to serve God.

### How to Please God

A man demanded of St. Anthony what he might do to please God, and he answered: Over all where thou shalt be or shalt go, have God tofore thine eyes, and the holy scripture, and hold thee in one place all still, and walk not ne royle not about in the country, do these three things and thou shalt be safe.

### Like a Fish Out of Water

An abbot came to St. Anthony for to be counselled of him what he might do for to be saved. St. Anthony answered to him: Have none affiance in the good that thou hast done, ne that thou hast kept thy belly and thy tongue well soberly, and repent thee not of penance that thou hast done I say, for like as fishes that have been long in the water when they come in to dry land they must die, in like wise the monks that go out of their cloister or cells, if they converse long with seculars they must needs lose their holiness and leave their good life. It behoveth the monks that they be solitary, and that they have three battles, that is of hearing, of speaking, and of seeing, and if they have but one of these battles, that is of the heart, yet they have overmuch.

### Mouths Overmuch Open to Speak

Some hermits came to St. Anthony for to visit him, and their abbot was with them; then said St. Anthony to the hermits: Ye have a good wise man with you, and after he said to the abbot: Thou hast founden good brethren.

Then answered the abbot: Truly I have good brethren, but there is no door on their house, each body may enter that will, and go into the stable and unbind the ass of within. And this said he because that the brethren had overmuch their mouths open to speak, for anon as they have thought on a thing is it come to the mouth.

Then St. Anthony said: Ye ought to know that there be three bodily movings, that one is of nature, another of overmuch plenty of meats, and the third of the devil.

### The Hermit Who Kept Things for Himself

There was an hermit that had renounced the world, but not perfectly, for he had somewhat proper to himself, whom St. Anthony sent to the market to buy flesh, and as he was coming and brought the flesh, the dogs assailed him, and all totare him, and took the flesh from him; and when he came to St. Anthony he told him what was happed to him; and then said St. Anthony to him: Thus as the hounds have done to thee, so do the devils to monks that keep money and have some proper to themselves.

### Labour and Pray

On a time as St. Anthony was in the wilderness in his prayer and was weary, he said to our Lord, Lord, I have great desire to be saved, but my thoughts let [hinder] me. Then appeared an angel to him and said: Do as I do, and thou shalt be safe, and he went out and saw him one while labour and another while pray, do thus and thou shalt be saved.

### The State of Souls Departed from the Body

On a time when the brethren hermits were assembled tofore St. Anthony, they demanded of him of the state of souls when they be departed from the body, and the next night after a voice called St. Anthony and said: Arise, and go out and see up on high.

When St. Anthony beheld upward on high he saw one long and terrible, whose head touched the clouds, which kept people having wings that would have fled to heaven, and this great man retained and caught some, and others he might not retain ne let for they flew forth up. Then he heard a noise full of joy, and another full of sorrow, and he understood that this was the devil that retained some souls that went not to heaven, and the other he might not hold ne retain, wherefore he made sorrow, and for the other he made joy, and so he heard the sorrow and the joy meddled together.

### A Vision Foretells the Arian Heresy

It happed on a time that St. Anthony laboured with his brethren the hermits, and he saw a vision much sorrowful, and therefore he kneeled down on his knees and prayed our Lord that he would emפש the great sorrow that was to come. Then the other hermits demanded what thing it was, and he said that it was a great sorrow, for I have seen of great plenty of beasts which environed me, which feared all the country, and I wot well that this is to say that there shall come a great trouble of men like unto beasts, that shall defoul the sacraments of holy church.

Then came a voice from heaven to St. Anthony that said that great abomination shall come to mine altar.

And anon after, the heresy of Arius began, and much troubled holy church, and did many evils. They beat monks and other all naked tofore the people, and slew Christian men like sheep upon the altars, and in especial one Balachyn did great persecution. To whom St. Anthony wrote a letter which said: I see the ire and mal talent of our Lord coming upon thee if thou suffer not the Christians to live in peace. Then I command thee that thou do to them no more villainy or thou shalt have a mischance hastily.

The unhappy man received this letter and began to mock St. Anthony, and spit on it, and beat well him that brought the letter, and sent again to St. Anthony these words: If thou hast so great charge of thy monks come to me and I shall give to thee my discipline.

But it happed that the fifteenth day after he mounted upon a horse over debonair, and nevertheless when the horse felt him upon him he bit him on the legs and thighs that he died on the third day.

### The Hermits Incapable of Patience

It happed another time that the hermits were come to St. Anthony and demanded of him a collation. Then said St. Anthony: Do ye this that is written in the gospel, if one give to the other a stroke on that one cheek show him that other?

And they made answer: We may not do so.

Then said he: Suffer ye it once debonairly.

They answered: We may not.

Then said St. Anthony to his servant: Give them to drink good wine, for these monks be over delicious. Fair brethren, put yourselves to prayer, for ye have much great need.

At the last St. Anthony assembled the hermits and gave to them the peace, and died and departed out of this world holily when he was of the age of an hundred and five years. Pray we to him that he pray for us.

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The [iconography of St. Anthony Abbot](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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