

ON SAINT ANTHONY

Everyone shall be perfect, if he be as his master [Lk 6:40 DRB]. In this text the Saviour praises blessed Anthony, our father and brother. Because praise of a disciple redounds on the master and praise of the master is shown in the disciple, the Saviour here is commending equally blessed Francis. The Saviour commends with a perfect commendation since it is praise of perfection. A person is commendable when moving towards perfection, but blameworthy when moving away from perfection. But the perfection of a master is one thing, that of a disciple another: the perfection of a master is a perfection of example, the perfection of a disciple is a perfection of conformity. Blessed Francis is commended here as a doctor of perfection when the text says: *master*; blessed Anthony is commended as a main imitator of perfection when it says: *Everyone shall be perfect, if he be as his master*.

The text says: *Everyone shall be perfect, if he be as his master*. Leaving aside the perfection of the master, that is, blessed Francis for which there is not time, we may say something on the perfection of blessed Anthony, his disciple.

There is a triple overall perfection to which all perfection can be reduced, namely, a perfection of virtue, of truth, of love or charity. The perfection of a rational creature consists in conformity and assimilation into the most blessed Trinity, since, as Anselm¹ says, one is more excellent and noble in so far as one is more similar to what is the highest, the most great and what exists in the most excellent way. By virtue one is conformed to the Father, by truth to the Son, by love to the Holy Spirit, in accord with the triple power of our mind in which the image of the Trinity has been sealed and impressed.²

I. Firstly, blessed Anthony was perfect in the perfection of his virtue. Perfection in virtue consists in two things, namely, in facing what is difficult and in preferring what is annoying and burdensome,³ so that a person of perfect virtue does great things and bears great things.

1. The first perfection of virtue consists in a virtuous pursuit of what is difficult and arduous, because as the Philosopher⁴ says: 'Virtue has to do with what is good and difficult'. What is difficult and arduous in itself is easy to the virtuous and to one practised in virtue, for, as Augustine⁵ says, a habit is that by which one works more easily. A virtuous work is to be faced and begun quickly and promptly, without delay or waiting, because *it is good to bear the yoke of the Lord from youth* [Lam 3:27]. The quotation refers to what is truly good because it matters not a little to accustom oneself from youth. 'A jar will retain for a very long time the scent of what is first poured in it when it is new.'⁶ The task must be done strongly without laziness and giving up: *Accursed is the one who is slack in doing the work of the Lord* [Jer 48:10]. The task must be done eagerly without sadness and upsetting the mind for delight is a sign of virtue.⁷ *Worship the Lord with gladness* [Ps 100:2]. The task must be done simply with a true and right intention: *Do everything for the glory of God* [1 Cor 10:31]; *Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven* [Mt 5:16]. The task must be continued with perseverance, not stopping because the work will be praised when finished: *But the one who endures to the end will be saved* [Mt 10:22; 24:13]. *No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God* [Lk 9:62].

Blessed Anthony was perfect in these points for he began quickly, continued strongly, finished eagerly, acted simply and persevered finally in this perfection: *Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God and did all that the Lord commanded him* [Gen 9:6 and 22]. *Noah*, blessed Anthony, quiet in his tranquillity of mind;⁸ a *man* in his strength of virtue, for the word *man*⁹ comes from virtue, according to Augustine, *De sententia Iacobi*;¹⁰ *righteous* in the evenness of his uprightness; *walked with God in the simplicity of his intention; and did all that the Lord commanded him* in the integrity of his obedience.

2. The second perfection of virtue consists in a virtuous endurance of afflictions and troubles. This is properly an act of fortitude, as Augustine says in *The Trinity*,¹¹ to prefer what is

annoying. Of this perfection we read: *Let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing* [Jas 1:4]. Endurance is said to have its full effect because the perfection of virtue comes through patience: *To Levi also he said, your protection and your doctrine be to your holy man, whom you have proved in the temptation and judged at the waters of contradiction* [Deut 33:8 DRB], that is, perfection of life, truth of doctrine and fortitude in both is proven in patience during tribulation. So Augustine says in his *Confessions*,¹² that a soul does not know itself until its strength has been tested in temptation. A soul is purified by patience that, like a file, cuts away every stain of sin or, like fire, burns up all that is unclean: *Everything that can withstand fire, shall be passed through fire* [Num 31:23]. In *Christian Instruction*¹³ Augustine says that Christ purges his body, the Church, with the medicine of certain annoyances so that cleansed from this world he may join to himself the Church as a bride for eternity, *without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind* [Eph 5:27]. A soul is also developed by patience; the purer a person so much the stronger is that person: *power is made perfect in weakness* [2 Cor 12:9]. A soul is also perfected in patience and for this reason the Saviour said patience is held in the soul: *In your patience you shall possess your soul* [Lk 21:19 DRB]. Also, patience is crowned and merits a kingdom: *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* [Mt 5:10]. For this reason troubles are to be borne with great joy: *Whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy* [Jas 1:2]; *As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour for the sake of the name of Jesus* [Acts 5:41].

In this blessed Anthony was perfect for when he heard that Brothers had shed their blood for the faith of Christ in Morocco, like an elephant ready for battle at the sight of blood, he entered the Order with the intention of suffering death for the name of Christ.¹⁴ Although his action did not bring him martyrdom, he was a martyr by vow and desire so that what is said of Martin¹⁵ can be said of him: ‘O most holy soul, although you did not receive the sword of persecution, you did not lose the palm of a martyr’.

II. Secondly, blessed Anthony was perfect in truth. The perfection of truth consists in two things, namely, in wisdom and in doctrine: in wisdom from a contemplation of truth itself, in doctrine from his knowledge of truth itself. He was perfect in wisdom because he understood truth; he was perfect in doctrine because he taught truth.

1. Firstly, the perfection of truth consists in wisdom from a contemplation of truth itself. *Do you know the balancing of the clouds, the wondrous works of the one whose knowledge is perfect [Job 37:16]?* The clouds are contemplatives,¹⁶ clouds I say, active above by raising the mind. *Who are these that fly like a cloud [Isa 60:8],* radiant from the radiance of truth, full of rain and dew from devotion? In these clouds there appears that most noble sight called the rainbow or the heavenly ark; it has three colours because it reveals to them the mystery of the Trinity, namely, how three persons are in one nature, and the mystery of the incarnation, namely, how three natures are in one person.¹⁷ So the text adds: *whose knowledge is perfect;* perfect from the dignity of the matter and the authority of certitude.

Blessed Anthony was perfect in wisdom from his skill derived from reading Sacred Scripture, from investigating hidden mysteries, from meditation on creatures while contemplating in all of them evidences of wisdom, from frequent prayer by asking for and requesting the light of wisdom. It is written of this: *Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me, I called on God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me [Wis 7:7].* While still young and not yet skilled in secular learning, he reached such knowledge of the divine Scriptures that he could use his memory as a library.¹⁸ Pope Gregory IX called him an ark of the Testament.¹⁹ This was correct because in him was found knowledge of both Testaments and the manna of wisdom.

2. Secondly, the perfection of truth consists in doctrine coming from the knowledge of truth itself. The treasure of wisdom is not to be hidden, but spread about and communicated: *Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets [Prov 5:16]?* The

worst avarice is avarice for knowledge since knowledge diminishes when hidden but increases when communicated. Augustine²⁰ says:

But it must needs be, and God will grant that I myself shall also derive profit by serving them with what they read, and in my eagerness to answer those who are seeking, I, too, shall discover what I was seeking.

Of this perfection we read: *And the clouds when God commands them to go over the whole world, do that which is commanded them* [Bar 6:61 DRB; Let Jer 6:61 NRSV]. *Clouds*, that is, preachers spreading doctrine: *When clouds are full, they empty rain on the earth* [Ecc1 11:3]. The command comes from the office imposed on them; *One does not presume to take this honour* [Heb 5:4]. *How are they to proclaim him unless they are sent* [Rom 10:15]? They went *over the whole world* by the spread of their preaching like the Apostle who *from Jerusalem as far around as Illyricum fully proclaimed the good news of Christ* [Rom 15:19]; and *Christ went about all the cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God* [Mt 9:35; Lk 8:3]. They completed what was *commanded them* as they carefully fulfilled their office.

Blessed Anthony was perfect in doctrine because he preached everywhere in an effective way so that when he spoke to great and small he struck with darts of truth.²¹ So in his canonisation Gregory IX began with the words: ‘O wonderful Doctor’.²² And because his tongue was a tongue of truth, when his whole body was corrupted, his tongue did not corrupt and indeed remains incorrupt until today.²³

III. Thirdly, blessed Anthony was perfect in love or charity. There is a double perfection of love, namely, a love searching above and a love spreading itself.

Firstly, the perfection of love consists in love searching above,²⁴ so that it might be a love raised up and lifted towards God, so that a soul might love God *with all its heart, soul and might* [Deut 6:5; Mt 22:37; Mk 12:30; Lk 10:27], love all things for the sake of God, and love nothing with God that is not loved for the sake of God. A person is cut off from heavenly love the more a person delights in what is

below.²⁵ God is rightly loved in this way since nothing is loved other than as something true and beautiful. But God is essentially good, the highest good, perfect good; created goods are only a kind of image, a shadow of this highest good and truth. So one must not pretend or strive for an affect but be totally directed towards God, otherwise the love is the love of a harlot: *Indeed, those who are far from you will perish; you put an end to those who are false²⁶ to you. But for me it is good to be near God* [Ps 73:27-28]. Augustine²⁷ says:

Woe to those who forsake your guidance and grope about among your shadowy imitations and, more enamoured of your signs than of you, are forgetful of what you wish to intimate.

But a soul maintaining a united and simple love must necessarily have perfect love: *My dove, my perfect one, is the only one* [Song 6:9]. *The only one*, unique and loving in a singular way; *dove*, simple and loving for the sake of the other; this is the perfection of love, this is perfect charity, that *casts out fear* [1 Jn 4:18]. Augustine²⁸ says:

Whoever loves only what cannot be taken from the person loving, is found to be rich and is not tortured with envy. Whoever loves what should be seen and loved, when more things come, the more fully does this person rejoice.

But such perfect love is impossible without poverty for, as Augustine²⁹ says, greed is the poison of love; an increase in love is a lessening of greed; perfect love, no greed. So we read: *If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor* [Mt 19:21].

Blessed Anthony was perfect in this love because to be free to love God he entered the Order of Canons Regular as a youth; later to love God more perfectly and unhindered he entered the Order of Lesser Brothers.³⁰

Secondly, the perfection of love consists in spreading love, a love so reaching out to the neighbour that a person loves every other person as one loves oneself, be the others friend or foe. Gregory³¹ says: 'A person who loves both friend and foe for the sake of God

loves truly'. A friend is to be loved either because the friend is good or might be good so that the better a friend is the more the friend might be loved. All are to be equally loved as persons and Augustine³² gives a proof of this. A neighbour is to be loved as we love ourselves; we love ourselves as persons not as beasts of burden or things to be washed. We do not love ourselves for what we can see of ourselves nor should we do this to a neighbour. If, therefore, we love a neighbour because he or she is a person and everyone is equally a person, then everyone is to be equally loved. But if a person is loved more not as a person but, for example, for being able to sing well because he or she gives an impression of being a fine singer, then, if I love a singer not because he or she is a person but because he or she is a fine singer, then all people who are equally fine singers are to be equally loved. People are not to be loved more for their bodies because we are more than our bodies. Of the perfection of love we read: *Above all, clothe ourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony* [Col 3:14]. *Above all*, that is, strive to have love more than anything else; or to have love which is above all because *the greatest of these is love* [1 Cor 3:13]; it *binds everything together* because the other virtues make one perfect but love binds them all together; or *perfect harmony* because love perfectly binds and connects lovers together. This is represented in the seamless tunic of the Lord [Jn 19:23]; whoever divides love, tears the tunic of the Lord.³³ *If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us* [1 Jn 4:12]. How sweet is mutual love: *How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity* [Ps 133:1].

Blessed Anthony had this perfection and so was ready to lay down his life for his brothers [Jn 15:13]. Anthony imitated the wonderful preacher who said: *I will most gladly spend and be spent for you* [2 Cor 12:15]. Therefore, let us ask etc.

NOTES

¹ *Monologium*, c. 34 (PL 158, 189).

- 2 See Augustine, *The Trinity*, book 14, ch. 12, n. 15, FOTC, vol. 45, 432: By ‘the triple power of our mind’ Augustine understands the memory, understanding and will.
- 3 See Tullius Cicero, *De inventione*, II, c. 54: ‘Patience is the cause of goodness and usefulness, a voluntary and daily enduring of what is arduous and difficult’ (ed. G. Schütz, I, Augustae Tarurinatorum 1823, 218); Augustine, *The Trinity*, book 14, ch. 9, n. 12, FOTC, vol. 45, 429.
- 4 Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea*, book 2, n. 3, WAE, vol. 9, 1104^b.
- 5 *The Good of Marriage*, ch. 21, n. 25, FOTC, vol. 27, 40.
- 6 Horace, *Epistle 2*, to Lolli, *The Satires and Epistles of Horace*, Chicago: University Press, 1959, 173.
- 7 According to Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea.*, book 2, n. 3, WAE, vol 9, 1104^b; *ibid.*, book 7, n. 3, 1153^b.
- 8 Noah means ‘rest’ according to Jerome, *De nominibus hebraicis*, on Genesis (PL 39, 826).
- 9 In Latin the word for man is *vir*.
- 10 Or *Epistola 167*, to Jerome, c. 3, n. 10 (PL 33, 737); the same in Ps.-Augustine, *Sermo 289*, n. 1 (PL 39, 2292).
- 11 Augustine, *The Trinity*, book 14, ch. 9, n. 12, FOTC, vol. 45, 429.
- 12 Book 10, ch. 5, n. 7, FOTC, vol. 21, 269.
- 13 Book 1, ch. 16, FOTC, vol. 2, 38.
- 14 *Legenda secunda* (written by Julian of Speyer), c. 1 (ed. in *Acta sanctorum*, for 13 June; F. Conconi, *Leggende di s. Antonio di Padova e altri documenti del secolo XIII*, Padova 1930, p. 8b); see M. Bihl, *La leggenda antoniana di Fra Giuliano da Spira*, O.F.M. *ed il suo Epilogo inedito*, in *Studi Francescani*, XXIX, 1932, 429-453.
- 15 Antiphon for Magnificat, second Vespers, Feast of St Martin, *Breviarium Romano-Seraphicum*, pars autumnalis, Rome: Typographia ‘Pax et Bonum’, 1951, 961.
- 16 See *Glossa ordinaria*, on Isa 60:8, in Lyranus (I, 187r).
- 17 See Innocentius III Papa, *De sacro altaris mysterio*, l. 4, c. 44: ‘The high heavenly council decided that just as there are three persons in a unity of substance, Father, Word and Spirit, so there would be three substances in a unity of person, divinity, body and soul’ (PL 217, 885).
- 18 *Legenda secunda*, c. 2 (ed. F. Conconi, p. 12b).
- 19 *Ibid.*, page 15b.
- 20 *The Trinity*, book 1, ch. 5, n. 8, FOTC, vol. 45, 12-13.
- 21 *Legenda secunda*, c. 2 (ed. F. Conconi, p. 14b); *Officium S. Antonii*, second nocturn, lesson 6, response: ‘Speaking to great and small, he struck as with darts of truth’ (in *Breviario Romano-Seraphico*, 13 June; and H. Dausend,

- S. Francisci Assisensis et S. Antonii Patavini Officia Rhythmica, auctore fratre Iuliano a Spira*, in *Opuscula et textus, Series Liturgica*, V, Monasterii 1934, 42).
- ²² This information of no small importance (first found by I. Juric) occurs here for the first time; see F. Antonelli, *L'elemento liturgico nel dottorato di Sant'Antonio* (in *S. Antonio dottore della chiesa*, Città del Vaticano 1947, 258).
- ²³ *Legenda prima (Assidua)*, additio: *De S. Antonii translatione* (ed. L. de Kerval), *De S. Antonii de Padua vitae duae* [*Collection d'Etudes et de Documents*, V], Paris 1904, 145.
- ²⁴ In the text, as noted by the editors, Matthew speaks of love spreading itself out but this is clearly a mistake.
- ²⁵ *In Evangelia*, l. 2, Homilia 30, n. 2 (PL 76, 1221); see above page 37.
- ²⁶ In the Latin text the word for false is fornicate.
- ²⁷ *The Free Choice of the Will*, book 2, ch. 16, n. 43, FOTC, vol. 59, 152-153.
- ²⁸ *De vera religione*, c. 46, n. 86 (PL 34, 160s.).
- ²⁹ *Eighty-three different Questions*, Question 36, n. 1, FOTC, vol. 70, 68: 'However, the poison of charity is the hope of getting and holding onto temporal things. The nourishment of charity is the lessening of covetousness, the perfection of charity'.
- ³⁰ *Legenda prima*, cc. 3 and 5 (ed. L. de Kerval, p. 26-32); *Legenda secunda*, c. 1 (ed. F. Conconi, p. 5-10).
- ³¹ *In septem psalmos poenitentiales expositio*, Ps 1, n. 10 (PL 79, 557).
- ³² *De vera religione*, c. 46, n. 87 and 89; c. 47, n. 90 (PL 34, 161-162); the quotations are not literal.
- ³³ See *Glossa* of P. Lombard on Col 3:14 (PL 92, 283-284).

