

Great Lent
Giveaway
2011

Benefiting
the Ukrainian
Orthodox
Church
Monastery
Initiative



Youth Group Session 2 **Leader**– St. Anthony of the Caves

Objective: Expose participants to the life of St. Anthony the Great (or St. Anthony of the Desert) and in doing so broaden their understanding of Orthodox Monasticism – primarily that of asceticism and hermits.

Needed items: Copies of participant pages, chairs (enough for three chairs per each participant), water bottles (1 per participant), dinner rolls (two per participant), palm fronds (enough for each participant or enough to make cross to pass out to parish), ask participants to bring a large blanket to the event.

Palm fronds may be purchased inexpensively at <http://www.catholicsupply.com/churchs/palm.html>
Download How to Make Palm Crosses at www.uoc youth.org – Great Lent Giveaway

Begin the session in prayer – *O Heavenly King.*

Ask the participants to take three chairs and set them up somewhere in the room, using their blanket with the chair to create a “cave”. Have them go into their “cave” and inform them that they will have some time for meditation and prayer. After five minutes, begin distributing their “provisions” of water and bread. After everyone has received their provisions, ask the participant to come out of their caves.

While they eat their “provisions” begin reading the life of St. Anthony on the participant sheets. Have them play “popcorn” while reading.

St. Anthony the Great, also known as St. Anthony of the Desert, was born in Egyptian city of Coma in the year 251.

Anthony was born into a wealthy family of very pious Christians. He was brought up in the church and it is said that we loved to attend services and listen to Holy Scripture.

When St. Anthony was around 20 years old his parents died and he became the guardian of his younger sister. A short time later while attending church, he listened to the Gospel of Matthew 19:21, “If you would be perfect, go sell what you possess and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me”. Christ’s word went to Anthony’s heart and soon he sold everything he inherited from his parents and gave it to the poor. He then gave his sister into the care of a group of pious virgins (many believe this may have been the start of the first female monastery).



St. Anthony began living in a small hut near his village. He would do work with his hands to earn money which he would share with the poor. He visited many ascetics in the area to gain spiritual direction

During this time, the devil would tempt St. Anthony with thoughts of this former life, doubt about the path he had chosen, concern for his sister and many other temptations. However, St. Anthony would combat these temptations by meditating on Christ. St. Anthony prayed even more and asked that the Lord show him the path to salvation. He was granted a vision in which a man would alternate between prayer and work. This angel sent to St. Anthony showed him his path. He became even more strict in his way of life; eating after sunset, praying until dawn and soon only sleeping every third day. The devil continued to torture St. Anthony with terrible phantoms and apparitions. St. Anthony stayed faithful through prayer.

St. Anthony decided that he needed even more solitude so moved away from the village and lived in a tomb at a local graveyard. Here again St. Anthony was tortured by the devil to the point of near death. Many demons took the form of ferocious beasts to try and force St. Anthony to leave but he continued to trust in the Lord. The Lord came to St. Anthony in a vision. Because of his faithfulness the Lord promised to always help him and make his name known throughout all of the world. St. Anthony experienced all of this before the age of 35.

St. Anthony then spent 20 years in the Thebaid Desert living in an old abandon fort. His friend would leave him bread twice a year and he had water inside the fort. At the end of the 20 years of struggles against the demons, St. Anthony achieved perfect calm and came out of the fort. Many were drawn to him and several monasteries began to surround him. He acted as a spiritual guide to the inhabitants of the monasteries.

At this point stop the reading and ask the following questions. Allow time for discussion.

- You spent a short amount of time in your “cave”. What was it like for you?
- St. Anthony lived on water and bread, similar to what we gave you. What are your thoughts?
- Do you think living in solitude was difficult for St. Anthony?
- Look at the photos of St. Anthony’s cave. What do you think it was like to live there?

Continue reading at this point.

In 311AD, there were renewed intense persecutions of Christians by the emperor Maimian. St. Anthony went to Alexandria to suffer for the faith. He openly ministered to those in prison and professed the faith. But instead of being imprisoned, our Lord spared St. Anthony. When the persecutions ceased St. Anthony returned to the desert. He spent a total of 85 years in desert. Before his death he instructed monks to keep the Orthodox Faith pure, to avoid associating with heretics and to stay faithful to their monastic life and struggles. He told them, “Strive to be united first with the Lord, and then with the saints, so that after death they may receive you as familiar friends into the everlasting dwellings.”

In 356AD, two of St. Anthony’s disciples, St. Athanasius of Alexandria and St. Serapion of Thmuis buried St. Anthony at the age of 105 in the desert by his request. The life of St. Anthony the Great was written by this same disciple St. Athanasius. This is the first biography of a saint who was not a martyr.

Lead the students in a discussion – Now that you have read the life of St. Anthony, how could the example of his life help you in your life? Let’s put St. Anthony’s life in perspective in regard to what was going on in the world.

Putting it in perspective....

Here is what was going on historically in 300-350AD:

- 301 – Armenia first to adopt Christianity as the state religion
- 306-337 - Emperor Constantine calls an end to the Christian



Entrance to St. Anthony’s Cave

persecutions in the Roman Empire and moves the capital of the Byzantine Empire to what was later named Constantinople

- 325 - Emperor Constantine calls the First Ecumenical Council held in Nicea
- 350 – Huns begin to invade the Sassanid Empire
- Contemporaries of St. Anthony: St. Basil the Great, St. John Chrysostom, St. Nicholas

What do you find interesting about the time during which St. Anthony was alive?

Following the discussion, explain that St. Anthony braided palm fronds in his struggle to overcome the demons. They are going to learn how to braid palm fronds into crosses that they can take home and possibly make to give to parishioners on Palm Sunday.

While braiding, read the *Sayings of St. Anthony*. Provide the participants time to discuss each saying. As an alternative, encourage the participants to read a saying a day during Great Lent and spend time meditating on them quietly.

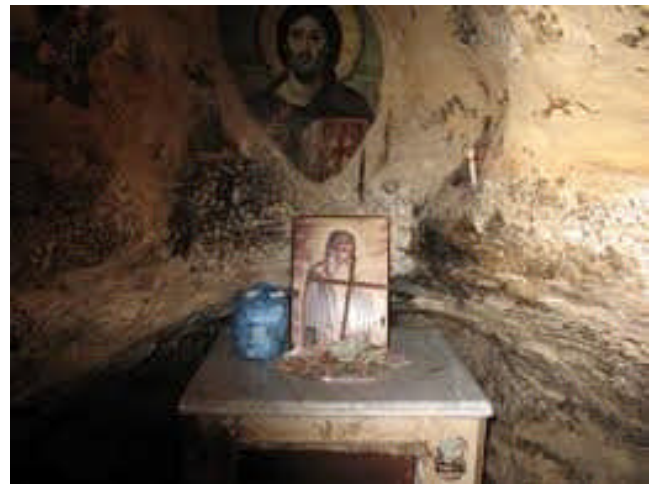
Close the session by praying together the Tropar of St. Anthony. Provide a Lenten meal or snack for the participants.

Tropar in the 4th Tone

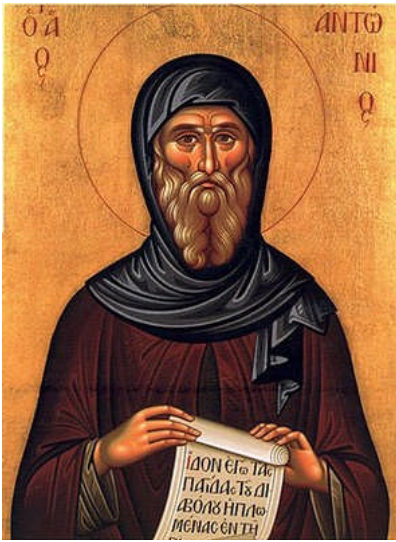
O Father Anthony, you imitated the zealous Elijah. You followed the straight paths of the Baptist and became a desert dweller. By prayer you confirmed the universe. Wherefore, intercede with Christ our God to save our souls.



Altar in the chapel at St. Anthony Monastery.



Icon Stand in St. Anthony's Cave



Sayings of St. Anthony

Sayings (apophthegmata) of Abba Anthony

1. When the holy Abba Anthony lived in the desert he was beset by accidie, and attacked by many sinful thoughts. He said to God, 'Lord, I want to be saved but these thoughts do not leave me alone; what shall I do in my affliction? How can I be saved?' A short while afterwards, when he got up to go out, Anthony saw a man like himself sitting at his work, getting up from his work to pray, then sitting down and plaiting a rope, then getting up again to pray. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct and reassure him. He heard the angel saying to him, 'Do this and you will be saved. At these words, Anthony was filled with joy and courage. He did this, and he was saved.'
2. When the same Abba Anthony thought about the depth of the judgments of God, he asked, 'Lord, how is it that some die when they are young, while others drag on to extreme old age? Why are there those who are poor and those who are rich? Why do wicked men prosper and why are the just in need?' He heard a voice answering him, 'Anthony, keep your attention on yourself; these things are according to the judgment of God, and it is not to your advantage to know anything about them.'
3. Someone asked Abba Anthony, 'What must one do in order to please God?' The old man replied, 'Pay attention to what I tell you: whoever you may be, always have God before your eyes; whatever you do, do it according to the testimony of the holy Scriptures; in whatever place you live, do not easily leave it. Keep these three precepts and you will be saved.'
4. Abba Anthony said to Abba Poemen, 'this is the great work of a man: always to take the blame for his own sins before God and to expect temptation to his last breath.'
5. He also said, 'Whoever has not experienced temptation cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. He even added, 'Without temptations no-one can be saved.'
6. Abba Pambo asked Abba Anthony, 'What ought I to do?' and the old man said to him 'Do not trust in your own righteousness do not worry about the past, but control your tongue and your stomach.'
7. Abba Anthony said, 'I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world and I said groaning, "What can get through from such snares?" Then I heard a voice saying to me, "Humility."'
8. He also said, 'Some have afflicted their bodies by asceticism, but they lack discernment, and so they are far from God.'
9. He also said, 'Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ.'
10. He said also, 'just as fish die if they stay too long out of water, so the monks who loiter outside their cells or pass their time with men of the world lose the intensity of inner peace. So like a fish going towards the sea, we must hurry to reach our cell, for fear that if we delay outside we will lose our interior watchfulness.'

11. He said also, 'He who wishes to live in solitude in the desert is delivered from three conflicts: hearing, speech, and sight; there is only one conflict for him and that is with fornication.'

12. Some brothers came to find Abba Anthony to tell him about the visions they were having, and to find out from him if they were true or if they came from the demons. They had a donkey, which died on the way. When they reached the place where the old man was, he said to them before they could ask him anything, 'How was it that the little donkey died on the way here?' They said, 'How do you know about that, Father?' And he told them, 'The demons showed me what happened.' So they said, 'That was what we came to question you about, for fear we were being deceived, for we have visions which often turn out to be true.' Thus the old man convinced them, by the example of the donkey, that their visions came from the demons.

13. A hunter in the desert saw Abba Anthony enjoying himself with the brethren and he was shocked. Wanting to show him that it was necessary sometimes to meet the needs of the brethren, the old man said to him, 'Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it.' So he did. The old man then said, 'Shoot another,' and he did so. Then the old man said, 'Shoot yet again and the hunter replied 'If I bend my bow so much I will break it.' Then the old man said to him, 'It is the same with the work of God. If we stretch the brethren beyond measure they will soon break. Sometimes it is necessary to come down to meet their needs.' When he heard these words "the hunter was pierced by compunction and, greatly edified by the old man, he went away. As for the brethren, they went home strengthened.

14. Abba Anthony heard of a very young monk who had performed a miracle on the road. Seeing the old men walking with difficulty along the road, he ordered the wild asses to come and carry them until they reached Abba Anthony. Those whom they had carried told Abba Anthony about it. He said to them, 'This monk seems to me to be a ship loaded with goods but I do not know if he will reach harbor.' After a while, Anthony suddenly began to weep, to tear his hair and lament. His disciples said to him, 'Why are you weeping, Father?' and the old man replied, 'A great pillar of the Church has just fallen (he meant the young monk) but go to him and see what has happened.' So the disciples went and found the monk sitting on a mat and weeping for the sin he had committed. Seeing the disciples of the old man he said, 'Tell the old man to pray that God will give me just ten days and I hope I will have made satisfaction.' But in the space of five days he died.

15. The brothers praised a monk before Abba Anthony. When the monk came to see him, Anthony wanted to know how he would bear insults; and seeing that he could not bear them at all, he said to him, 'You are like a village magnificently decorated on the outside, but destroyed from within by robbers.'

16. A brother said to Abba Anthony, 'Pray for me.' The old man said to him, 'I will have no mercy upon you, nor will God have any, if you yourself do not make an effort and if you do not pray to God.'

17. One day some old men came to see Abba Anthony. In the midst of them was Abba Joseph. Wanting to test them, the old man suggested a text from the Scriptures, and, beginning with the youngest, he asked them what it meant. Each gave his opinion as he was able. But to each one the old man said, 'You have not understood it.' Last of all he said to Abba Joseph, 'How would you explain this saying?' and he replied, 'I do not know.' Then Abba Anthony 'Indeed Abba Joseph has found the way, for he has said: "I do not know."

18. Some brothers were coming from Scetis to see Abba Anthony. When they were getting into a boat to go there, they found an old man who also wanted to go there. The brothers did not know him. They sat in the boat, occupied by turns with the words of the Fathers, Scripture and their manual work. As for the old man, he remained silent. When they arrived on shore they found that the old man was going to the cell of Abba Anthony too. When they reached the place, Anthony said to them, 'You found this old man a good companion for the journey?' Then he said to the old man, 'You have brought many good brethren with you, father.' The old man said, 'No doubt they are good, but they do not have a door to their house and

anyone who wishes can enter the stable and loose the ass.' He meant that the brethren said whatever came into their mouths.

19. The brethren came to the Abba Anthony and said to him, 'Speak a word; how are we to be saved?' The old man said to them, 'You have heard the Scriptures. That should teach you how.' But they said, 'We want to hear from you too, Father.' Then the old man said to them, 'The Gospel says, "if anyone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt. 5:39) They said, 'We cannot do that.' The old man said, 'If you cannot offer the other cheek, at least allow one cheek to be struck.' 'We cannot do that either,' they said. So he said, 'If you are not able to do that, do not return evil for evil,' and they said, 'we cannot do that either.' Then the old man said to his disciple, 'Prepare a little brew of corn for these invalids. If you cannot do this, or that, what can I do for you? What you need is prayers.'

20. A brother renounced the world and gave his goods to the poor, but he kept back a little for his personal expenses. He went to see Abba Anthony. When he told him this, the old man said to him, 'If you want to be a monk, go into the village, buy some meat, cover your naked body with it and come here like that.' The brother did so, and the dogs and birds tore at his flesh. When he came back the old man asked him whether he had followed his advice. He showed him his wounded body, and Saint Anthony said, 'Those who renounce the world but want to keep something for themselves are torn in this way by the demons who make war on them.'

21. It happened one day that one of the brethren in the monastery of Abba Elias was tempted. Cast out of the monastery, he went over the mountain to Abba Anthony. The brother lived near him for a while and then Anthony sent him back to the monastery from which he had been expelled. When the brothers saw him they cast him out yet again, and he went back to Abba Anthony saying, 'My Father, they will not receive me.' Then the old man sent them a message saying, 'A boat was shipwrecked at sea and lost its cargo; with great difficulty it reached the shore; but you want to throw into the sea that which has found a safe harbor on the shore. When the brothers understood that it was Abba Anthony who had sent them this monk, they received him at once.'

22. Abba Anthony said, 'I believe that the body possesses a natural movement, to which it is adapted, but which it cannot follow without the consent of the soul; it only signifies in the body a movement without passion. There is another movement, which comes from the nourishment and warming of the body by eating and drinking, and this causes the heat of the blood to stir up the body to work. That is why the apostle said, "Do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery." (Ephes. 5:18) And in the Gospel the Lord also recommends this to his disciples: "Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness." (Luke 21:34) But there is yet another movement, which afflicts those who fight, and that comes from the wiles and jealousy of the demons. You must understand what these three bodily movements are: one is natural, one comes from too much to eat, the third is caused by the demons.'

23. He also said, 'God does not allow the same warfare and temptations to this generation as he did formerly, for men are weaker now and cannot bear so much.'

24. It was revealed to Abba Anthony in his desert that there was one who was his equal in the city. He was a doctor by profession and whatever he had beyond his needs he gave to the poor, and every day he sang the Sanctus with the angels.

[Sources: OrthodoxWiki.org]