January 17th: Memorial of Saint Anthony, Abbot

Gospel text (*Mt* 19:16-26): A young man approached Jesus and said, “Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?” He answered him, “Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He asked him, “Which ones?” And Jesus replied, “You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man said to him, “All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and said, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”

“Go, sell what you have and give to the poor... Then come, follow me.”

Fr. Antoni CAROL i Hostench
(Sant Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain)

Today we celebrate with emotion the memory of St. Anthony, Abbot, one of the most popular Fathers of the Church. Born in Egypt, he lived between the 3rd and 4th centuries. He was one of the first monks of Christianity and a pioneer among the hermits: after giving his possessions to the poor, he retired to the desert to subsist on a life of prayer and penance.

"Come, follow me" (Mt 19:21). Yes, we are "elated" for, by musing over the exemplary life of St. Anthony, we see that the Church very clearly recognized the "method" from its very beginning: prayer, prayer, prayer. Times and circumstances may change, pastoral needs may change too or even doctrinal discussions..., but what will never change is the path to follow Jesus: prayer, prayer, prayer. We still pray to Jesus Christ! We get to know God and reach Him by praying!

And this "method" is common for all of us. The monks, hermits, as in the case of St. Anthony, the Abbot,

give us a radical testimony that should lighten all others. It is not an exaggerated attitude, but a radical choice, as radical - firm, strong, untouchable - is any real love.

“Sell what you have...” To walk the path of prayer we should travel light. If we are hauling too many things we do not speak with God about or with anyone else: we go our own way! Let us learn from Christ: the Son of man, by having nothing, did not even have a comfortable place at His birth, or where to lay His head during His public ministry, or even to die.

“Give to the poor.” St. Anthony, the Abbot did not "seek refuge" in the desert to "defend himself" from people, but to consecrate himself to God, and in God, to surrender to men. Precisely, where he was, there came many to share his path or to receive his consolation and guidance. Pope Francis says: “The prayer that pleases God is that which goes from a personal encounter with Him to a consecrated life at the service of others.”