

## SANTO ANTONIO DE LISBOA or SANTO ANTONIO DI PADUA?

First published in the NATO Bulletin of July 1997

Fernando de Bolhões, who would later be known as Santo Antonio, was born on August 15, 1195 in a small house right in front of the Lisbon cathedral, where later the church of *Santo António* was erected.

He showed from his early years a great interest in learning, and it was within the church that he received his first lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic, and also music. Fernando was a very clever boy and was reputed to have an amazingly good memory. In his free time he used to walk along the river Tagus and watch the boats entering and leaving the port, dreaming of the day he would be on one of those boats, en route to other lands.

His faith grew stronger, and his religious vocation pushed him to enter the monastery of *São Vicente de Fora*, which belonged to the St. Augustine Order. He developed there his theological knowledge through the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and the classic philosophical theories

In order to escape from the temptations and attractions of the city, he moved to the monastery of *Santa Cruz* in Coimbra, where he became a canon of the Order of St Augustine. Some time later, he discovered that a small Franciscan hermitage existed on the outskirts of Coimbra, dedicated to St Anthony the Great, and there he met a group of Franciscans on their way to Morocco, where they died later as martyrs when trying to convert that country's people.

This unfortunate event had an enormous impact on the mystic character of Fernando de Bolhões who decided to leave the Order of St Augustine to join that of the Franciscans and thereby try to spread Christianity among the people of Morocco. He asked permission to change his name to Antonio and, after joining the Franciscans, he left for Morocco; but on the way there he fell ill and decided to return to Portugal. His boat, however, was wrecked during a storm and came ashore on the Italian coast. Santo António was sheltered by the Franciscans whom he helped to create a Franciscan chapter in the town of Assis. He met later St Francis who, charmed by his eloquence and wisdom, invited him to become professor of Theology to the other monks.

From then on, he never stopped travelling through Italy, France, and any place where he could address and preach to the people. His endeavours in fighting heresy, and the innumerable miracles witnessed by the people who loved and worshipped him, led Pope Gregory IX to give him the title of "Ark of the Testament". Santo Antonio died in Arcela, in the neighbourhood of Padua, on June 13, 1232. He was canonised at Spoleto less than one year later, on May 30 1233.

Recently, in 1946, Pope Pius XII proclaimed him Doctor of the Church. Santo António was the first and only Portuguese Doctor of the Church, and he was the first Portuguese missionary, possibly the first Portuguese emigrant too. But he was also the Santo António di Padua, a city where he was much loved and honoured. However, due to his worldwide moral and intellectual influence, he must truly be considered as the "Saint of the whole World" as Pope Leo XII proclaimed in 1895.

During the month of June, festivities take place all over Portugal to celebrate the three saints - Antonio, João (John) and Pedro (Peter); of the three, Santo Antonio is by far the most popular, and June 13 has since long been a holiday in Lisbon where the celebrations take the form of marches and "arraial", especially in the old part of the city; and the young children build "thrones" to Santo António, asking the tourists and other visitors for small coins that they will later spend in buying

sweets. In the Italian city of Padua, where he lived the very last years of his life and where he died, a magnificent basilica was built as a memorial, and festivities are also organised in his honour on June 13, and will last for a few days.

**Santo António of Lisbon** was born on Assumption Day, and this is the reason why, unlike the other saints, Santo António's iconography shows him with Jesus in his arms, a privilege he shares with the Virgin Mary who is also celebrated on August 15.

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