

Blessed Anthony Grassi (1592-1671) entered the Oratory in Fermo at a young age and eventually became its superior. The Fermo Oratory no longer exists, but its memory is perpetuated in Blessed Anthony.

Liturgical Feast Day is December 15

Anthony Grassi was born in 1592, three years before Philip's death, in Fermo, a town of a few thousand inhabitants on the Adriatic coast. He was the eldest child of five born to a devout middle class family. Antonio was a good natured and intelligent boy, and quickly gained the respect and admiration of his teachers and friends. He showed early signs of piety in his frequent attendance of daily Mass which he would serve on his way to school. The first experience of suffering that Anthony encountered, it seems, was a long illness at the age of ten which was soon followed by the death of his father. But Anthony's spirit was not to be conquered by life's blows. He took to frequenting the newly founded Oratory in Fermo more often than he used to and received regular spiritual direction from Father Ricci who had known Saint Philip personally. The Fathers all took a liking to Anthony and he in turn presented himself to the Congregation as a postulant just before his seventeenth birthday in 1609.



Anthony's natural intelligence and love of learning made his studies for the priesthood a pleasant time in his life. His good memory made it possible for him to acquire an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, and the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Anthony also received a spiritual formation to complement his academic achievements.

Each year Anthony made a pilgrimage to the holy house of Loreto which was only twenty miles away. On one such visit, Anthony was struck by lightning and knocked unconscious. He received the anointing of the sick and the doctors gave him little hope of recovery. But God had other plans for him. Anthony was completely healed through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin; and from that time on recognized all the more his dependence on God and sought all the more to dedicate himself completely to His Will.

In 1625, Anthony went on a pilgrimage to Rome, which turned out to be his only trip away from Fermo except for his yearly pilgrimage to Loretto. In Rome, Anthony went to see all the places that Saint Philip used to frequent and also to learn as much as he could about Saint Philip from Father Pietro Consolini who had known the Saint intimately. Anthony meditated upon this knowledge and applied it in his own life for ten years before imparting it more explicitly to others when he was elected superior of the Fermo Oratory in 1635. Anthony retained the position of superior for the next 36 years until his death in 1671. In his government of the Oratory, Anthony imitated the gentleness of Saint Philip and of his Divine Master whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.

Perhaps the life of Blessed Anthony does not immediately strike our imagination. He did not go off half-way across the world to spread the faith as did Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Jean de Brebeuf, or other well known missionaries. He is not known for great feats of physical mortification. He left no learned writings to make his name known in seminaries and universities. He did not found a religious order or institute. And his life was not as permeated with the supernatural as was Philip's who also shunned all worldly honours. Anthony's life was a hidden one in a small provincial town in an institute whose priests and brothers should strive to be unknown; and there he found his peace. Perhaps, the very commonness of his life should make him of special interest to us and to our restless age.

Anthony accepted that Divine Providence had placed him in Fermo. He was born there; there was an Oratory there which he liked; there was no need to go elsewhere to seek his vocation. Anthony was able to discern among the familiar sights of youth a call to a divine work which needs to be carried out among the commonplace.

Anthony also realized that whatever vocation we are called to, we can be sanctified in it by doing each task well, no matter how menial and seemingly unimportant. One of his oft-repeated maxims was 'ad litteram, ad litteram', meaning, to the letter - to follow the rules of the institute to the letter. This attitude requires humility. It requires humility to subject ourselves to a law or a lawmaker. And it requires wisdom and humility to recognize that there is virtue in following a rule - whether it be a rule of a religious community, a rule of a place of work, a rule of family life, or one of the ten commandments. All good laws are there to help us become better as individuals and to smoothen the functioning of society. When we ignore all laws and rules and act just to please ourselves, order breaks down in society and in our souls; we become slaves to the law of our passions. Anthony feared this breakdown in the harmonious life of the Oratory whose few rules help to establish the spirit of Saint Philip, and, hence, he always demanded that the rule be kept by others and ensured that it was by keeping it himself.

One of the works that Blessed Anthony was especially known for was visiting the sick and the dying. He ever kept the reality of death before him which helped him to remain faithful to his vocation. He knew that nothing in this life is permanent, that there is no point in trying to find our complete happiness here but that we must seek it from God in heaven. In 1671, as Blessed Anthony lay dying he said with great joy, "What a beautiful thing it is to die a son of Saint Philip." There is no better end to an Oratorian vocation.