

New forensic research on the body of the saint from Padua

## Discovering the face of Anthony

UGO SARTORIO

The Biblical verse "Your face, Lord, do I seek" (Ps 27:8) expresses a consuming desire that is woven throughout all Scripture – from the beginning to the end. Each of us desires to meet the "face" of those we love and when they are far away we visualize them instead, making them present with us. This is also true for God whose face is truly indescribable, and even more so for the saints, many of whom have endless iconography dedicated to them. The list includes the Virgin, St Joseph, St John the Baptist and the Apostles, St Francis of Assisi and St Anthony, his disciple.

Let's ask ourselves: how is it possible to give a face to saints? Saints were well-known

and yet none of their contemporaries thought about depicting and recording their image for future generations. Perhaps because what mattered was the dimension of their interiority and their faith, rather than their physical characteristics or the lines of their faces.

When applied to St Anthony this discussion points to a long history which is about to conclude definitively or at least almost definitively. On Tuesday evening, 10 June, at the Altinate San Gaetano Cultural Centre in Padua, the saint's face was revealed to the world in 3D. Commissioned by the University of Padua, the research was completed by Cicero Moraes, 31, a Brazilian who works in the field of visual design.

Let's start from the beginning and move forward. In the second half of the 70s, when I was a novice at the convent of the saint in Padua, every-

one believed that the image which best depicted (closest to the real St Anthony) was that which can be found in the chancel on the side of the church where his tomb is located.

The Basilica guides explained that it was a painting by the school of Giotto, made in the third decade of the fourth century, which is plausible given that Giotto was in Padua for a long time since he was painting the Scrovegni Chapel. Personally, I fell in love with that gentle

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The oldest image of the saint located in the Basilica of St Anthony in Padua, Italy

### Called to service

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necessary and indispensable condition that every person, both individually and in the communities in which he belongs, can freely express himself, grow, and thereby respond to the particular vocation that God has in store for each of us.

Dear Carabinieri, your mission is expressed in service to your neighbour, and you commit yourselves every day to living up to the faith and esteem that the people place in you. This calls for constant availability, patience, spirit of sacrifice and sense of duty. Your work is supported by a history written by faithful servants of the State who have honoured your Corps by offering themselves... – let us remember them at this time, with the heart, with prayer and silence. (silence) – ... in adherence to the sworn oath and generous service to the people. Let us consider God's servant Salvo D'Acquisto who, at the age of 23, here

near Rome, in the town of Palidoro, spontaneously offered his young life to save the life of innocent persons from Nazi brutality. In the wake of this long tradition, pursue your service with serenity and generosity, witnessing the ideals that give life to you and your families, who are always at your side.

Your commitment beyond national borders is greatly significant. Even abroad, in fact, you force yourselves to be peace makers, to guarantee security, respect for human dignity and the defense of human rights in Countries troubled by conflicts and tensions of every kind. Do not cease anywhere, at home or abroad, to give clear and joyous testimony of humanity, particularly toward the most needy and unfortunate.

May the Virgin Mary, your Heavenly Patron, whom you venerate with the title *Virgo Fidelis*, keep watch over you, your families and your service. Remember her with

and slightly rotund figure. His right hand held out in a blessing and the other with the book of Sacred Scripture, give the impression of solemnity and warmth to the first depiction passed down to us of the miracle worker.

In January 1981 – the last time a survey was performed on the body of a saint, and the first time since 1263 when St Bonaventure's tongue was found to be incorrupt – a team of specialists analyzed in detail his mortal remains, searching for clues to his physical structure.

It turns out that St Anthony was six or eight centimetres taller than the average height of that time (about 1.70 metres or almost 5 ft 7 inches) and that he did not have a round face, rather a long and narrow one. He was graced with strong and developed legs (as someone who walked great lengths which, for him, meant also great evangelization), and his knees bore traces of prolonged prayer. It is also worth noting that his teeth, while completely healthy and normal, show signs of a vegetarian diet and one that was anything but plentiful.

In short he was a handsome man of Atlanto-Mediterranean descent with a noble and refined profile, cut from a cloth which was both strong and fragile, as also noted by a researcher on the saint, Fr Doimi: "His strict standard of living, the bitterness of penitence, his exhausting ministry of confession and ceaseless preaching, give us reason to believe that the saint had a solid physique by nature even though he died young. The violent fevers of Africa made him sick, and perhaps were the ultimate reason for his habitual infirmity and death".

faith, especially in moments of weariness and difficulty, certain that, as a tender mother, she will know how to present your needs and hopes to her Son Jesus.

Before invoking the Lord's blessing upon you, I would like to announce that on 13 September I intend to make a pilgrimage to the military Shrine of Redipuglia in the province of Gorizia, to pray for the fallen of all the wars. The occasion is the 100th anniversary of the start of that enormous tragedy that was the First World War, about which I heard many painful stories from the lips of my grandfather, who fought on the [River] Piave.

Thank you, dear Carabinieri friends, for having come in such numbers! May the Lord bless you and your families.

I invite you to pray to the *Virgo Fidelis*, our Mother, for the entire Carabinieri Corps, for the authorities, for your families, for the fallen and for the homeland.



3D reconstruction of Anthony, who was found to have had olive skin, deep brown eyes, full lips and a small beard

The search for the true face of the saint did not finish with the data collected in the translation of his body in 1981. Thirty years later, due to advanced technology, it was deemed necessary to utilize all available means for a new study. The work was made possible thanks to the advent and evolution of the methods of forensic science, now famous thanks to television shows like *CSI* or *Bones*: from only the skull his face and its features were reconstructed with a high degree of objectivity.

### A genuine and zealous shepherd

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for the Syro-Malabar priests who study in Rome. He was also very helpful in securing scholarships and other forms of financial assistance for seminarians and priests from the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches.

It can be said without any hesitation that he spent all his time in Rome for the development of the various Churches that were under his care. Many of the missionary projects of the Particular Churches all over the world were kept alive by his support and missionary zeal.

It is to be noted that everyone who met the Cardinal came away with the impression of a person who works hard and who would spare no effort to help the Church to grow and develop. He was particularly notable for his intelligent grasp of facts and details of the subject matter whenever he was present at a meeting.

May the Lord, who has guided Cardinal Lourdasamy throughout his existence, receive this tireless servant of the Gospel and the Church in the heavenly Jerusalem!

May he be a source of inspiration to the Indian Catholics to spread the Gospel of love and compassion throughout India! Amen

\*Cardinal, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church