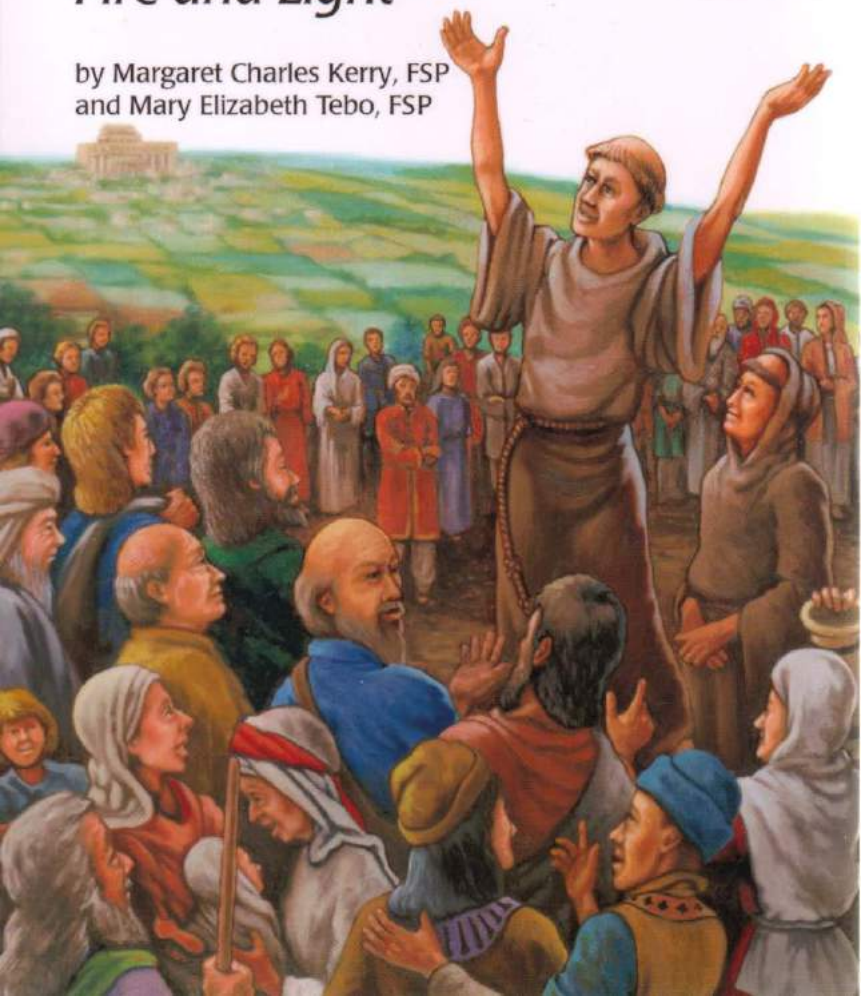


Saint Anthony of Padua

Fire and Light

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A LETTER AND A PROMISE

Twelfth-century Lisbon, Portugal, nestled on the banks of the Tagus River, breathed a quiet sigh as the year 1147 came to an end. With King Alfredo at its head, the Portuguese kingdom was at peace. But this happy situation was not to last.

In 1185, Sancho I took over the tiny kingdom of Portugal. Two thoughts filled his mind: build castles and become rich with gold. The people were taxed and taxed again until they could hardly buy food to eat. Their churches and monasteries were given to wealthy nobles and those loyal to the king. Life was difficult.

Just west of the great Cathedral of Lisbon, lived a young soldier named Martin and his wife Maria. Martin was in the king's service, so the couple's life was a little easier than that of most of their neighbors. Maria and Martin were good people with a deep religious faith. Martin often refused the privileges King Sancho offered him. He

didn't want special favors that were not granted to others.

On August 15, 1195, Martin and Maria's first child was born. They named their baby boy Fernando. While all the family rejoiced over Fernando's birth, little did they know that in a few short years the entire world would join in the rejoicing. Little did they know that their Fernando would be remembered down through the centuries as Saint Anthony of Padua....



"Martin! Martin!" called Maria. "Come in out of the heat. I have good news!"

"Coming, coming," a deep voice echoed back.

Martin stepped inside the cool home and dabbed at his forehead with a large handkerchief. Maria eyed her husband with pride. He carried himself with dignity and his bronzed skin and elegant mustache added to his distinguished look.

"Martin, your brother's written to say he'll be coming soon." Maria hugged her husband. "It will be good to see him again.

And he can give his blessing to the baby. I'm so excited!"

Martin's brother, Fernando, was a priest, happy with God and with his vocation. His occasional visits brought much joy and were always a good excuse for a family celebration.

"Now, Maria, stay calm," Martin gently chided. "When Fernando comes, he comes."

"The problem with you, my husband, is that you're *too* calm," Maria jokingly complained. "The baby's sleeping. I'm going to call one of the servants to prepare Fernando's room. Don't be late for supper."

The final days of summer were full ones for Maria. Caring for little Fernando and managing her household staff kept her busy, but she eagerly looked forward to Father Fernando's visit. Early one morning as she gazed out the window she spotted a familiar figure coming up the path.

"Martin...quick! It's your brother! Father Fernando is here!" Maria cried excitedly as she headed down the stairs, baby Fernando cradled in her arms.

Martin had already swung wide the front door. "It's so good to see you again, Fernando!" he exclaimed, embracing his brother.

"And it's very good to be here," Fernando grinned back.

Maria came up and gently placed the baby in Father Fernando's arms. "And who do we have here?" the priest half whispered. "He's beautiful. What have you named him, Maria?"

Maria was stunned. "Why, Father! Don't you remember? I wrote to you before he was born: 'If it's a boy, he will be named after you.'" Maria anxiously searched her husband's face. "Isn't that right, Martin?"

With a mischievous grin, the priest passed the baby back to Martin.

"Of course, Maria, of course. But I still say he looks just like me. Maybe we should have named him Martin after all."

Maria looked from brother to brother. "Shame on the two of you!" she finally sputtered. "You play jokes on me all the time!"

"Only because you take them so well, my dear," Martin laughed.

"Well, come have some breakfast now," Maria invited. "Your bag will be brought to your room, Father."

"Thank you, Maria, but first a blessing for my new nephew." Father Fernando raised his hand in the sign of the cross over the baby happily resting in Martin's muscu-

lar arms. "Little Fernando," he said, "I bless you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. I also give you my promise. You will bring all people of this generation closer to God. You will search out those who do not yet know him and bring them the truth. The fire of your love will burn like a light in the darkness."