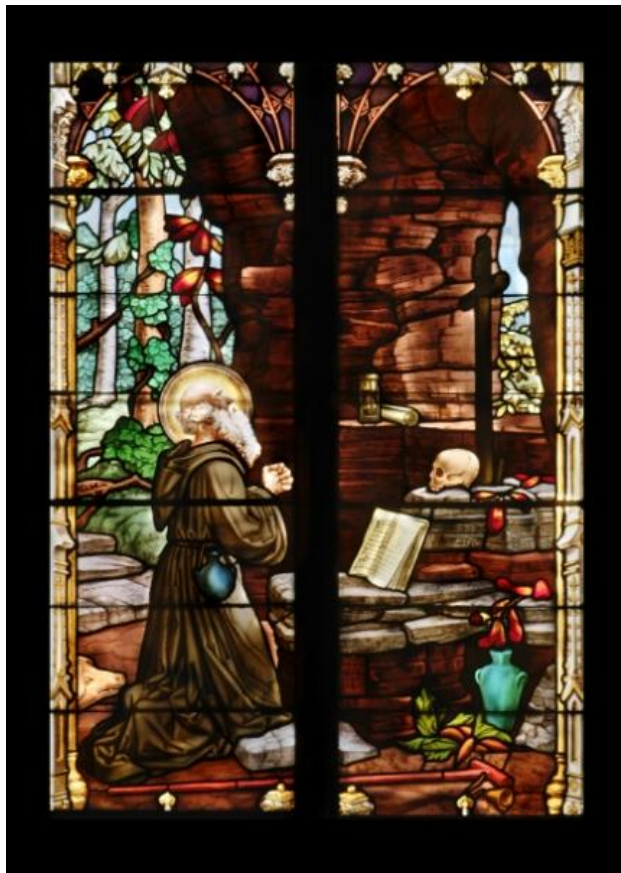


Anthony the Hermit



One of the stained glass windows I find myself gazing at frequently from the back of St. Louis is that of a Priest or Friar, clad in what appears to be a brown Franciscan robe, kneeling before a skull perched above an open book. His eyes are cast upward, his hands are clasped, and he is deep in prayer.

The Franciscan habit is something I am quite familiar with as my beloved twin Uncles: Adrian and Julien Riester, were Brothers of the Franciscan Minor Order. My Uncles were truly pious men, and as a child, when they appeared gliding slowly and purposefully up the driveway of my parent's house, they seemed otherworldly in their flowing brown habits. They were identical twins, born on the same day. However, they literally created a worldwide sensation when the both passed away, returned to The Lord, on the same day: June 1st, 2011! As they were both shy, somewhat reclusive men

of God, I think they would have been embarrassed by all the fuss!

And speaking of reclusive, it turns out that the image in the stained glass window is that of Saint Anthony the Hermit, also known as Anthony of Lerins and as *The Father of Monks*—a Christian saint. The Church celebrates his life on January 17th as the founder of Christian Monasticism.

His is a most interesting tale: he was born around 251AD. His parents were wealthy, and left him a large inheritance. However, like St. Francis, he was deeply moved by The Gospel of Matthew 19:21, where Jesus instructed the young man to sell what he had, give it to the poor, and come follow him. St. Anthony the Hermit did so--giving away all that he owned to go off and live for 15 years in the desert, in complete solitude and in prayer. He was visited by pilgrims, whom he refused to see, but over time, a number of his "disciples" took residence in the caves and huts around the mountain called Pispir. It

was here that a colony of ascetics gathered, in the hope of speaking with the famous hermit; they must have sensed his holiness and wisdom, and because of that, he was sought out for “healing, comfort, and direction.” He was also known to have performed miracles, which further cemented his reputation as a Holy Man.

Their persistence paid off; in 305 he emerged for roughly 5-6 years to counsel the monks who had come to live in the colony. However, he once again heeded the call to seclusion and he retreated to the inner desert that lay between the Nile and the Red Sea, to a mountaintop abode, where he spent the last 45 years of his life in seclusion. It is here on this site that a monastery still stands, bearing his name: Der Mar Antonios.

He is said to have passed away in 356—at more than 100 years of age. At a time where that far surpassed the average life-span! It is said that he asked that the location of his grave not be revealed--to avoid having his body and final resting place become a destination of reverence.

During his life, Saint Anthony repeatedly sought out the desert. Consider the desert as a metaphor for a cleansing and purifying heat—where John the Baptist was forged in silence and in solitude, and where Jesus fasted and prayed for 40 days and 40 nights. And, likewise, when Anthony the Hermit emerged from the desert, he was stronger--fortified with the wisdom and power of the Lord.

Norman Vincent Peale was quoted as saying “silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together.” However, silence and solitude are becoming something of a memory from a bygone era; for now the world is all too much with us with its noise, clangor, and confusion. Saint Anthony the Hermit’s image is palpable at St. Louis Church—reminding us that as busy and hectic as the world has become outside the Church doors, peace, wisdom, and understanding comes, paradoxically, in silence, and in the stillness of solitude.