



On January 17, Italian Catholics celebrated the Feast of St. Anthony by, well, feasting. My friend Marco Budinis traveled to Chiavari for its feast. He writes: "In Italy Saint Anthony the Abbot is remembered for being the protector of domesticated animals. In several towns in Italy (as it is in Chiavari in January) several celebrations are held run and there are also country fairs, mostly with booths with food stuff, but also plants such as lemon trees, orange trees and so on. We feasted on *porchetta* (above) and spicy olives, cheese, and salami." *Porchetta*, of course, is boned whole small pigs stuffed with garlic, rosemary, and fennel. Mary Jane, Harald & Renate, and I tasted this at the big CIBUS food show in Parma last May, and I think *porchetta* is one of the best foods I've ever tasted. St. Anthony is also the patron saint of ergotism, a poisoning caused by the ingestion of alkaloids produced by the *Claviceps purpurea* fungus that infects rye and other cereals that are used to make bread. The condition is called "St. Anthony's Fire" and the symptoms are hallucinations, painful seizures, and spasms. Ergot is a precursor to LSD and some experts believe it caused the Salem witch trials because people afflicted with ergotism from infected bread acted so strangely they were thought to be witches.