

Augustinian Friends Prayer Resource Guide

AN EASTER POEM

We've Learnt to Fly

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Aggiornamento is so feared but why?
The Son has risen is our Easter cry!

Why our focus fixed on fear
when Easter Joy proclaims Love's Spirit is here.

Only fools deny evil's gross intent.
We've seen Easter's Love is more resilient.

Our God is Friend not Executioner,
Those we've feared, rejected, ridiculed, condemned
the time has come to ask forgiveness and welcome them.

Each age awakening has its New Story to birth
new life emerging from where truth and love
contend for what is caring and just.

The Spirit of Change challenges closed tight minds,
questions what's in place, pulls open the blinds!

There's been fresh air through the open doors.
Why close them now, shut the prophets out
and surrender to the fear we deny or imagine we can ignore?

Why cling to the faith as is
and reject the new our journeys bring?

Nowhere in creation unfolding
does a butterfly squeeze back into its cocoon!

Noel Davis

"From the Wilds of the Heart"
(Comes the Singing of the Quiet)

Lifeflow Education
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The Purpose of the Prayer Resource Guide

Each of us is on a journey to
God like our patron Augustine.

The Friends prayer resource is
offered to you as a support in
your day to day prayer and
will be sent to you 4 times a
year.

It is centred on the Gospel
readings for coming Sundays
and quotes from Augustine. It
also contains a prayer orien-
tated letter from our Chaplain
and some tips on Lectio Di-
vina – the traditional Augustin-
ian method of scriptural reflec-
tion and meditation.

Reconciliation — A Creative Act

'We should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life'

These are the famous words of the loving Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, which was the Gospel reading from Luke for the 4th Sunday of Lent. The theme of this Gospel is reconciliation.

In the parable, Christ clearly shows that the central point of this reconciliation is the “coming back to life” of the young son. He achieves this primarily by making a choice about returning to ‘right living’ in the house of his father. We are invited to make that same choice through the sacrament of Reconciliation, by returning to a place where our lives are securely anchored in Christ. With Christ as our centre, our lives overflow with creativity. Our gifts come to fruition and we develop awareness of other’s gifts and cheerfully encourage them. This is how we build the Kingdom of God right now, in the Present Moment.

Of course, we make mistakes and sometimes we are willfully destructive – we do sin. Reconciliation is about acknowledging this reality. Like the Prodigal Son we need to ‘return to our senses’ and make an honest confession. Most importantly, we need to have a genuine change of heart as we make a conscious decision to change our ways. This is not an overnight change which is why the sacrament of reconciliation is best conducted within an environment of mutual respect and trust, pursued over a prolonged period of time.

Long before modern psychotherapy, the Church understood the importance of sharing our burdens with others. It is important to our psychological and physical health. Many of us could recall times when we have been seriously burdened by sin and have confessed that sin in the sacrament. The feeling of relief of being unburdened and being able to move on is truly one of the great gifts of the Holy Spirit. Properly understood, reconciliation is a sacrament of healing and growth.

The Sacrament (and the critical role of a loving priest centered in Christ), is supported by friendship and the counsel of wise friends. This is how we ‘build the Body of Christ’. The priest takes the role of the Forgiving Father who doesn’t judge, but welcomes us back with joy. In this role, the priest represents Christ who has already pardoned our sins and simply longs for us to follow him in living creatively by sharing our unique gifts.

We must never forget that this forgiveness is always available when we show genuine repentance and a desire to change. Too often we wallow in our own judgements, or the perceived judgement of God, or others. This is actually the sin; because we are willfully separating ourselves from God by our lack of trust.

And what do we find when we trust God’s forgiveness? Our Parish Bulletin during the Lenten season featured a beautiful quote from St Augustine that sums up the process and the outcome perfectly:

'In humility and charity, by fasting and giving, by restraining ourselves and pardoning, by paying out good deeds and not paying back bad ones, by turning away from evil and doing good, our prayer seeks peace and obtains it. Prayer, you see, flies beautifully when it is supported on wings of such virtues and is in this way more readily wafted through the heavens, where Christ our peace has preceded us.'

Christ our peace has preceded us – this is the key point.

We should also note the balance in Augustine’s words. He reminds us that we must fast *and give, show restraint and pardon* . . . this is the balance of a generous heart such as that of the forgiving Father in Luke’s Gospel.

We should not be like the elder son in the parable who shows restraint, but cannot pardon his brother. This is the attitude of the Pharisees and the Scribes who were also part of Christ’s audience in the Gospel. Such an attitude is an obstacle to the very notion of reconciliation and is nothing like our generous Father in Heaven. It is only when one asks for forgiveness and another is generous enough to forgive, that reconciliation takes place.

So let us remember that *Christ our peace has preceded us*. In light of this we can lay down our burdens in reconciliation and get on with the creative life for which we were made.

Paul Griffiths



Richard Rohr's response to: The Passion of the Christ

Since a number of people have asked for my take on Mel Gibson's movie, **The Passion of the Christ**, let me give just a few thoughts that might be helpful to some of you. Take them for what they are worth.

I must admit that I went to the movie with strong prejudice, largely because of Gibson's Neanderthal version of Catholic Christianity, and his similar politics. I figured it would have no redeeming insight or quality. I attended with a group of fellow friars, and came away touched by some scenes, and even awestruck by others, although I think it largely came from a lifetime of meditation on Jesus and personal love of Jesus. I was prepared to fill in the gaps. How could a movie about him not prompt deep response and sentiment?

Specifically, I have hopes that the movie can give images of unconditional love and a redemptive quality to suffering that our world barely understands anymore, and deeply desires. It also has that "whomp on the side of the head" quality that it takes to get young peoples' attention, and particularly to get male attention. It could well start some people on a serious Jesus journey or spiritual search, even by some of the confusing questions that it raises. This is excellent, and the Spirit will surely use the movie for good.

Negatively, I agree with those who say the movie is almost entirely one-dimensional. It is about suffering pure and simple, as if Jesus was just born to suffer. He has no other message. There is no plausible "why?" to his suffering, and no connection with his teaching, his social or religious critique, his prophetic vision. Any true drama needs character development and not just spectacle. Aristotle said that spectacle was a cheap substitute for true drama, and it would drown out any in-depth message. I believe that is what happens here.

It ends up being a message of Divine will power instead of the much more needed messages of human vulnerability, human solidarity, and human compassion. Jesus for me is *the quintessential human*, a God given prototype of the human problem and solution, more than a religious version of Atlas or Prometheus. Gibson's version of Jesus is closer to a Hollywood superhero or Greek god than to the Biblical version of the "son of man." Although again, I admit, it can still lead people to the human Jesus, but I am just afraid that the Divine heroics will cancel out the human.

As many of you know, I am a strong proponent of the Franciscan understanding of the redemption, based on the teaching of Blessed John Duns Scotus in the 13th century. He did not believe in any "substitutionary atonement theory" of the cross: Jesus did not have to die to make God love us, he was paying no debt, he was changing no Divine mind. Jesus was only given to change our mind about the nature of God! (Imagine what we are saying about the Father, if he needed blood from his son to decide to love us! It is an incoherent world with no organic union between Creator and creature. No wonder so few Christians have gone on the mystical path of love, since God is basically untrustworthy and more than a little dangerous.)

For Duns Scotus, Jesus was the "image of the invisible God" who revealed to us God's eternal suffering love for humanity, in an iconic form that we could not forget. He was not "necessary," but a pure gift. The suffering was simply to open our hearts, not to open God's--which was always open. Unfortunately, the movie is entirely based on the old atonement theory that suffering was needed, the more suffering the better, and the most suffering the best of all. Unfortunately, it has been the mainline tradition, and has been made into dogma by evangelical Christians. It creates a mercantile Christianity with God as the major debt collector, when what Jesus came to offer was a mystical Christianity with God as the "bridegroom."

It might take these graphic images of suffering love to break through some peoples' consciousness, but I am afraid it will largely be true for people who do not *think* too much. Because once you start thinking, the whole thing falls apart. The movie does not appeal to the whole person. Emotions are not bad, however, and can serve as a catharsis and an opening. They might be God's way into the soul--and our way out of ourselves. But eventually, the message must compel head, heart, and gut, and lead to an honest image of God, the world, and ourselves.

Maybe the success of the movie reveals our own lack of wholeness, or even any desire for the whole picture. Maybe we don't want to put religion and life together. Maybe we don't want our spirituality to have any social or political implications. Maybe we like parts more than wholes. And surely good parts are very good, as long as we do not allow them to become substitutes for and deflections from the whole picture, which is the very definition of the Holy.

From our Chaplain

AN AUGUSTINIAN JUBILEE

April 7th. 2004

Dear Friends,

Just as the entire Church celebrated in the year 2000 a Jubilee year of the birth of Jesus as a time of grace, joy and conversion, so in the year 2004 the world-wide Augustinian family will be holding special festivities to honour the 1650th. Anniversary of the birth of St. Augustine which occurred on the 13th. Of November, 354.

For the next twelve months there will be a number of opportunities to remember in a special way the life and example of St. Augustine upon whose charism and spirituality our life is based. During this time we can give thanks to God for the great gift that Augustine represents for the Church, for our Family and for all humanity over so many centuries.

Remembering who we are and what we have received gives us cause for celebration. To CELEBRATE is to give thanks to God for life in all its abundance, and joyfully to share with one another our experiences and our hopes. We can strengthen and support each other in our Augustinian identity by coming together to learn, to listen to one another and to discover anew our common bond which has at its base the wisdom and example of Augustine's life guiding us along our own Christian journey.

The major way we in Australia will be honouring the Jubilee Year is at a gathering in Sydney on the weekend of October 1st to 3rd. when the **Second National Lay Congress** will be held at the Brimson Centre of St. Augustine's College, Brookvale. Like all Jubilee celebrations this will require a journey and perhaps hardships and difficulties for those who are planning to attend.

The chosen theme for the Congress is "Travelling Together" which is a very Augustinian quality. No one travels to God alone, but always in the company of others. Rather than stride on alone regardless of others, we offer a helping hand to those who travel with us and in turn receive support from them along the way.

Planning the journey may be onerous but the welcome you receive when you arrive in Sydney will be very warm indeed. Those of us who remember the wonderful atmosphere of the First National Congress in Echuca in 2001 are determined to match the hospitality that we experienced there, and the variety of activities that will be offered during the two full days available. In the flyers accompanying this Prayer Resource you will gain some idea of what is being planned by the very enthusiastic committee who are already hiring caterers, lining up speakers and workshop leaders, choosing music and entertainment, and booking a very special venue for the Congress Dinner on the Saturday night.

A Jubilee only happens every fifty years so I missed the last time Augustine's birthday was celebrated by the Order in this special way. This is a once in a life-time opportunity to come together with Augustinian priests, sisters and laity to be reconfirmed in our delight at what we share in the tradition, example, wisdom and timelessness of Augustine's vision which calls us to be "men and women of the world in the heart of the Church; men and women of the Church in the heart of the world."

If you need any help in organizing accommodation or the particular workshops, events, liturgies or Congress celebrations that you would like to attend, please do not hesitate to contact the committee members who are listed in this mail-out who will be only too happy to assist you in planning for this unique opportunity. I look forward to celebrating this Jubilee with you.

With much love,



**AUGUSTINIAN FRIENDS
SHARING THE SPIRITUALITY OF AUGUSTINE**

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