

Augustinian Friends Prayer Resource Guide

Travelling Together in Prayer

The theme of our just concluded National Congress was graphically captured by the presence of a large steamer trunk and a collection of antique luggage assembled on the stage. It suggested the wear and tear required for the participants to arrive at this destination. As each parish was announced they placed their name on the luggage to declare their place of origin and to witness to the fact that we had come from many parts of the eastern seaboard of Australia.

Now that you have returned to your homes I thought it might be of benefit to reflect on what happens to us when we travel together for a spiritual purpose, and how the very journey can be a prayer. Fr. Frank Doyle made a particularly long journey to be with us (28 hours by plane) and has now returned home the same way. I asked him to put some thoughts together that could sum up his experience of the Congress and of the journey he made to be with us as our mentor and guide.

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Dear Fellow Travelers,

I write this as I am about to leave these Australian shores en-route home to Maggi Valley. I leave with many fond memories of both my experience of the Second National Congress for the Laity and the many "Friends" that I was privileged to meet.

It was inspiring to see the dedicated team-work of the organizing committee and the enthusiastic participation of those who attended. I found the entire Congress both uplifting and challenging: uplifted by a vibrant Augustinian spirit so obviously present, and challenged to imagine how we in the U.S. might further develop a community of lay persons who share in the same Augustinian spirit. In his work on The Trinity, Augustine wrote:

"Each of us (has) something to learn from others and something to teach in return". (De Trinitate, IV, 8)

I have learned from you the creative openness of the Australian spirit that seeks to image a new way of organizing and gathering as Augustinian Friends, culturally adapted, while striving to be in harmony on our way toward God.

I pray that, guided by the Holy Spirit, you will continue to develop the gift that God has given you, teaching other Augustinian friends throughout the world how to creatively respond to the needs of God's kingdom as we travel together with one mind and one heart.

Your brother in Christ,

Frank Doyle, OSA

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 orientated letter from our Chaplain and some tips on Lectio Divina - the traditional Augustinian method of scriptural reflection and meditation.

In The Footsteps of St. Augustine

For six days in September fifty Augustinian pilgrims returned to North Africa to visit the places where Augustine lived and ministered 1600 years ago. Frs. John McGlone and Dave Austin joined the pilgrimage from Australia and traveled together on a parallel course to the one many of us shared at the Congress in Sydney. We get a taste of what the journey was like from the reflections of an American Augustinian, **Fr. Joe Farrell, OSA**.

"The experience of traveling to the North of Africa to the countries of Tunisia and Algeria as a group of 50 pilgrims in the "Footsteps of Saint Augustine" was a real experience of prayer and blessing. The group was made up of lay people and religious which included representatives from 12 different countries. Alternating between Spanish, Italian and English, The Augustinian Jubilee prayer was recited together by the group as the journey began each morning on the bus. At the end of each day's journey Mass was celebrated in thanksgiving for the blessings received that day.

The highlights of the various sites visited usually included a reading from Augustine referring to the particular site, or a reading of an excerpt from a homily actually delivered at that site itself. Of all the places visited, some which stand out as exceptional are the ancient Basilica of St. Cyprian where Augustine left Monica waiting in prayer as he left for Rome from the port of Carthage, the amphitheatre where Felicity and Perpetua experienced their martyrdom, the ancient ruins of Bulla Regia, the ancient city of Thagaste (now Souk Ahras in Algeria), and of course, the ancient ruins of the Basilica at Hippo (now the Algerian town of Annaba).

Standing at the site where Augustine instructed the people of Hippo with his homilies, and witnessing the places where he celebrated the sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism gives one a sense of reverent awe. Sitting on a now crumbled column which once supported the Basilica of Hippo and listening to a homily that was delivered by Augustine himself over 16 centuries ago, allows one to imagine the countless numbers who experienced this great man in person and just how many lives were forever touched because of his love for God and his leadership in the Church.

Walking through the ruins of the Basilica of St. Cyprian and viewing from the top of the hill the beautiful coastline of Carthage, sparks in one's imagination the feelings in both Augustine and Monica on the evening he clandestinely left for Rome. And traveling from site to site, seeing the faces of the people who greeted and guided the group, offered to each of the pilgrims a glimpse of what Augustine perhaps could have looked like as a small boy in Thagaste, a teenager in Madaura, a young man in Carthage, or a wise Bishop in Hippo.

The experience of walking in the footsteps of Augustine in some of the important places of his formation as a young man and his ministry as a Bishop is one that will be held forever in a special place in the hearts of each pilgrim. The beauty of the scenery and in the people encountered by the group made this journey a real pilgrimage of prayer and joy. In a poem recited to the group by the Mayor of Souk Ahras (Thagaste) in which an olive tree is singing in praise of Aurelius Augustine, our international group of laity and religious bonded in Augustine, were offered the command and the wish, "may this native son never be forgotten". In the same way, may this pilgrimage be a moment which will be forever remembered and cherished in the hearts of those who were blessed to have spent a week journeying "in the footsteps of Augustine".

Augustinian Pilgrimage in Tuscany

Each year Fr. Michael Morahan in his capacity as Rector of Villanova College, Brisbane, organizes at least one pilgrimage for the staff and families, and one for the pupils of the school so that they can experience something of the origins of the Order which has formed their spirituality over so many years. In the weeks leading up to the Congress, Fr. Laurie Mooney OSA accompanied the Villanova group along with two participants who had come to know Augustine through contact with the Augustinian Spirituality Centre at Greystanes. Having attended workshops and prayer days with a distinctly Augustinian flavour they were ready for the real thing and launched into the experience with great enthusiasm. This account gives us a further insight into what many experienced at the Sydney Congress with its theme of "Travelling Together".

I had never been on a pilgrimage before – a journey with a spiritual purpose! I wondered what a spiritual journey could mean for me? Some weeks before our departure *The Good Weekend Supplement of The Sydney Morning Herald* carried an account by an Australian woman who dealt with the grief of her 28 year old journalist son's death in Iraq by trekking alone from London to the Welsh coast. I was very touched by the story of Anna Little's countryside pilgrimage through hardship, solitude, prayer and tears to eventual healing. It gave me a glimpse of a contemporary meaning of pilgrimage.

Now for 12 days I was to join 26 others from Brisbane and Sydney to visit Augustinian holy places in Rome and Tuscany, the 13th century cradle of the Augustinian Order. What would it be like? What would be our experience there and how would I be affected personally?

Our pilgrimage began in the wonders of the Eternal City with its ancient monuments, papacy and long spiritual history. But it was Tuscany and the hilltop town of San Gimignano near Siena that was the objective and destination of our group. Most significantly we were to stay in the 13th century monastery of Saint Augustine, perched on the walls of this amazingly preserved medieval town.

The Augustinians of San Gimignano welcomed us most warmly to their monastery with its stone cloisters and huge wooden front door. The atmosphere of the monastery was striking: quiet antiquity, a beautiful church and chapel, enclosed gardens, small monk's cells yet with panoramic Tuscan views. We were beneficiaries of friendly and relaxed hospitality throughout our nine-day stay.

On some days we pilgrims celebrated Mass together, at other times we gathered in reflection. When we came to share our thoughts in the group all recognised that the spirit of community had built up among us. One told of the joy that Mass together was for them, another was moved by the sight of our pilgrims strung in a line along the road in Ostia. Others spoke of the "hard work" of travel we had undergone. Keeping a group of 26 together in travel and sightseeing is not easy!

We two Augustinians in the group were no strangers to a monastic environment but most of the others had never stayed in a monastery before. It was wonderful now to be all together in a place dedicated to a spiritual purpose, a beautiful building that carried the atmosphere of centuries of prayer and of life aspiring to God in the tradition of Saint Augustine.

We became aware that the early Augustinian movement in Tuscany had begun nearby with groups of rural hermits. These inspired men truly shared with Saint Augustine his longing for a hidden life of prayer. They had left towns and cities for Tuscan woods and hillsides in search of an interior life of contemplation, the deep and solitary experience of God within one's soul. We Australians learned that the Order from its inception right up to the 1970's was known as the "Order of Hermits of Saint Augustine". When asked did they realise the Augustinian Order was originally a contemplative movement, one reflection group responded "No!"

However, in a real way we Australian pilgrims residing in the monastery had now psychologically separated ourselves from the world too. Perhaps our stay would draw us more into our inner selves, to where God reveals himself. We sensed that in the interiority of our heart lies our real strength. Augustine had written:

"I entered my inmost being....I saw above my mind an unchangeable light...the light that had made me." (*Conf. 7,10, 16*)

In our travels we learned that the hermits who began the Order lived not as solitary individuals but in intimate communities. They were not at all withdrawn from one another. Instead their ideal, taken from St. Augustine, was of communion of mind and heart with one another on the way towards God. Reflecting on their communion and friendship in God made us aware of the joyous experience of the oneness we had experienced throughout our pilgrimage. Augustine even taught that the hope of a life after death is hope of a community after death - concordant fellowship in the enjoyment of God *and of one another!* "Even in heaven the life of the blessed is a social life." (*City of God 19,5*)

We loved the monastery of San Gimignano. The coming happily to the refectory table each night, the blessings upon our meals and sharing of wine, the times of communal prayer and mutual help reminded us that we too were of 'one mind and heart' on the way towards God. As Augustine added, "In this way your mind is not yours alone, but belongs to all the brothers and sisters." (*Letter 243*) In this holy place of prayer and joy we did truly belong to one another!

