

Augustinian Friends - Prayer Resource Guide

June /July 2007

SHARING THE SPIRITUALITY OF AUGUSTINE

HOW DO I PRAY TODAY? IN THE PRESENCE OF A FRIEND

By Fr. John Landy O.C.D.

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Editor's Note: St. Teresa of Avila was very much influenced by Augustine's Confessions particularly where he speaks of finding God interiorly and in friendship. This article from one of her followers, an Australian Discalced Carmelite who has spent many years in the Holy Land and Rome, appeared in the October 2006 edition of the periodical Mount Carmel and is printed with permission of the author.

3 When the clock chimes

I think our initial ventures into prayer contributes to our later experience of it. One of my earliest memories is that of family prayer. We, as a rather large family, struggled through the rosary with the various factions trying to dominate. But after the rosary came a special time for me as the youngest. My parents took me to their room and, seated on my mother's lap with my father kneeling beside, I was helped to say my evening prayers. It was a lovely feeling, for I had my parents just to myself for these short moments and it certainly left me with the sentiment that prayer meant you were with people you loved and who loved you beyond doubt.

One very early influence on the way I prayed was a certain, quite old, Sister of Mercy. She had taught my grandmother as a student teacher, my mother and all my brothers and sisters. Now at the age of over ninety, she taught the five- and six-year-olds. Every time the clock chimed in class, which could have been every fifteen or thirty minutes, she encouraged us all to stop for a few seconds to pray to God in an aspiration or words of our own. This soon became a habit which remained with me during my primary and secondary education.

In words and music

Another contributing factor to my prayer life was my love of music. I started learning it when I was seven and, as I progressed in facility, I found I was able to pray to God in music. I was able to listen to all the wonderful emotions expressed with such beauty and offer these to God in a wordless (if not loud) form of prayer. This devotion had to be curtailed in a religious life which had an emphasis on silence, but I still find it easy to pray with music, and sometimes sing favourite hymns in my mind when all else fails.

From prayers to prayer

From our Carmelite authors I discovered so much in the distinction between saying prayers and prayer. St. Teresa understood prayer as a developing friendship with God whom we experience and know absolutely loves us. I was particularly struck when she mentioned that it was to be hoped that the liturgy would become for us prayer in this deep sense. This led me to try and make it so.

The Purpose of the Prayer Resource Guide

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

The Friend's 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 draws on the Gospel readings for coming Sundays with quotes from Augustine. It also contains a prayer orientated letter from our Chaplain and a variety of approaches to ways of praying within the Augustinian tradition.

How do I pray today? continued. . . .

I came to understand that John of the Cross was talking of prayer as a journey in love, through which we are purified until our choice of God matches, in some way, God's choice of us. What a difference it made for me to see that John was describing a process of liberation in loving and allowing oneself to be loved - rather than a process of total denial, as it would appear on the surface.

One Carmelite author who helped me a great deal was Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection and his *Practice of the Presence of God*. At that particular stage of my life much of my time was taken up in giving retreats to busy men and women who usually did not have the ordered style of life that allowed for extended times of personal prayer. I remembered what that old nun had taught us as children, and saw that she was teaching us exactly what Br. Lawrence suggested. God is always closely present to us, but we often forget this. When we remember to 'glance at God present to us', as Teresa suggests, our whole life can become a prayer. In the discussions during retreats parents often revealed the sacrifices they made to spend time in personal prayer. One couple prayed together after midnight when the children were asleep. One driver of a road train said it was easy for him: he was locked in the cabin, insulated from outside noise, and prayed all day long.

In Bible Lands

Once more I have returned to the Holy Land to be stationed at 'Stella Maris' the Order's mother house in Haifa, Israel. What a difference this has made to my appreciation of scripture and the psalms, on seeing the very scenery described there. On Mount Carmel we are just a short bus journey from Nazareth. The title of the first Carmelites for Mary, 'the Lady of the place', began to sink in. Jews still come in busloads to visit this place so closely identified with the prophet Elijah, the defender of belief in the living, one true God. There is a sense of our Lady being a neighbour and it feels credible to believe that she might have come to this holy place like the Jews in procession over the ages from Old testament times to the present day.

How do I pray today?

To begin the day, I like to set my alarm a long time before I have to get up, so there is no rush. I pray in bed for ten minutes or so, using mainly the Jesus Prayer, if nothing spontaneous comes. This seems to give a calm beginning to the day. After a leisurely getting ready, I proceed to the Divine Office and private prayer. I still find a type of spiritual elation in reciting the psalms in the land in which they were composed. Many are the references to Jerusalem where I have also lived. One of the themes of the psalms is the human person's position, as it were, at the head of spiritual and physical creation; we are the ones to notice with our senses the rich aspects of creation and to give praise to God for his goodness. This is something I try to do during the day if something strikes my attention. If I notice a passing phrase in the psalms I often take it for my private prayer afterwards. I do the same in the liturgy of the Eucharist, and I try to reap the benefit of its rich symbolism.

Should I find prayer disturbing or distracted, I use either Therese's method of talking to God about the distraction, or I use the Jesus Prayer to centre myself once again. I like to use just the holy name of *Jesus* which is so rich in meaning, or something cheerful like 'Jesus, thank you for your love, thank you for your friendship'. Sometimes I use *lectio divina* where I have time to savour the texts and perhaps repeat sentences over and over again. I have also, for many years now, made some of my private prayer where I work as I find this gives a special atmosphere to the work place. For the rest of the day, I try to continue with the practice of the presence of God.

I remember once hearing someone say that a great problem we have with prayer is that we limit our understanding of it. We speak to others in many different ways; by what we do, by what we refrain from doing, by gestures, by sharing—and even by words! Why should prayer not be like that? Why should we not see all these things as sharing with someone who is our Friend?



From our Chaplain

Editors Note: Instead of my letter to you I am forwarding a message from Dave Austin inviting us to respond to a questionnaire which the Augustinians are sending out to all the Lay Groups attached to our Australian Province. In the next few days I will forward the survey to the local leaders and ask that they call a meeting or hold interviews so that a large cross section of "Augustinian Friends" can provide us with feedback. If you would like to answer the survey individually by e-mail please contact me on paulmal@bigpond.com.au and I will forward it back to the Commission. Thank you for giving this your personal attention. With much love, *Paul*

LAITY COMMISSION SURVEY – AUGUSTINIAN FRIENDS

Dear Friends,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Augustinian Laity Commission of the Province to seek responses from your group to the enclosed survey.

The Augustinian family in Australia consists of a variety of lay groups with different focuses and goals but all seeking to follow shared Augustinian values. Indeed, throughout its history, our Province has had a strong tradition of close and cooperative relationships between Augustinians and laity. Recent development of various lay groups and sharing of Augustinian Spirituality have enhanced that tradition even more.

At the June meeting of the Laity Commission, members decided to seek feedback from the various groups in the Province. Hence this request to Ministry Leaders and Chaplains to consult a representative group of those with whom they are in contact.

The following information about the Commission may prove helpful in assisting the group with which you are associated to respond to the survey:

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Commission is to develop and strengthen the bonds/ relationships between Augustinians, our lay associates, co-workers and those whom we serve, as well as the relationships among the various lay groups within the Augustinian family.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP:

David Austin OSA (Chair), Roderick Cameron OSA, Paul Maloney OSA, Brendan Quirke OSA, Greg Keogh, Mary McCormick, Jim McDonald, Michael de la Cruz (WYD Officer)

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

Develop the relationship between the Order and Augustinian Friends in a manner that empowers Augustinian Friends and others.

Review with the Augustinian Formation Association its place in the Augustinian family in Australia and develop the fundraising and friendraising capacities.

Organise a schedule of events and opportunities for spiritual development and social gatherings with our Affiliates.

With the Formation Commission to develop the profile for staffing St John Stone Spirituality Centre (special research on how best to utilize lay employees)

Review the needs of Young Adults arising from the Order's involvement with World Youth Day Encounter events

The Commission is keen to affirm and empower each group, and so we are seeking your perceptions about how things are going at present, your current needs, and your hopes for the future.

The next meeting of the Commission will be in late August or early September, so we would appreciate your **responses by 24 August, please**. This will give us time to collate them prior to the meeting. Please forward your responses to me by mail or email them to: dave.austin@augustinians.org.au. For obvious reasons, email is preferred.

Yours in Augustine,

Dave Austin OSA
On behalf of the Laity Commission.

20 July 2007.

Tolle Lege (Take and Read)

I invite you to Take and Read the reflections offered on this page as a support to your own time of Contemplation.

I have reached the watery depths;
The flood overwhelms me.
But I pray to you O Lord,
For the time of your favour, O God. Ps. 69:3.14

Reflection

Once I have confronted and accepted—as far as possible - that I am a needy person, the act of turning to God is relatively easy. It is not faith in God that is hard, but the renunciation of illusory faith in myself. To turn towards God means, first, turning away from whatever is untrue or delusory - no matter how much comfort it brings. I have never met a man or woman or child who has not undergone suffering. I suspect it is passing through such periods that we begin to discover our deeper selves; we make contact with our neediness and find in our hearts a great longing and love for the God who remains unseen. As life goes on and our cumulative sense of this God is strengthened, we begin to desire more intensely to seek God more explicitly. This is the normal way God draws people more deeply into prayer.

Fr. Michael Casey, O.C.S.O.
Toward God

Prayer

Dear God,

We pray for balance and exchange.
Balance us like trees.
As the roots of a tree are equal to its branches
so must the inner life be equal to the outer life.
And as the leaves shall nourish the roots
so shall the roots give nourishment to the leaves.
Without equality and exchange of nourishment
there can be no growth and no love.

From Michael Leunig
A Common Prayer