

Augustinian Friends - Prayer Resource Guide

Spirituality for Lay people who Share the Augustinian Charism

In November of this year the Catholic Newspaper for the Diocese of Sandhurst (cleverly called "*Sandpiper*"), began a series of articles on the Charisms which have helped shape the people of that extended community over its more than a century of existence.

The word charism comes from the Greek *charis*, which means both 'gift' and 'grace'. The Church teaches that through Baptism and Confirmation we have all received unique personal gifts and graces from the Holy Spirit to be used altruistically.

Throughout the history of the Church, there have been individuals who have received God's call to share their unique gifts widely with others - for the benefit of the whole community not just for a few. The special charism of people such as these has been so evident that it inspires followers to imitate or adopt for themselves aspects of the attractive qualities they could so readily observe.

The article praises the many Religious Orders or Lay movements which have shared the charism of their Founders with the people of Northern Victoria. They are like a particular lens through which to view the otherwise overwhelming mystery that has taken place in our human history with the coming of Christ into our world. By using the perspective of particular charismatic figures we can see more clearly the steps we must take in following our Redeemer.

To start off the series, the Editor has chosen to highlight the impact of the Augustinian Order on the spiritual landscape of the Diocese, owing to the fact that the first two Bishops to pastor the fledgling flock were of that same Order. Bishop Martin Crane OSA was installed as Bishop of Sandhurst by Archbishop Gould OSA of Melbourne in St. Killian's Church, Bendigo, on Sunday May 23, 1875. From that time on until the departure of the Augustinians from Kyabram in 2006 there has been an unbroken chain of dedicated men who 'caught' the spirit of St. Augustine in their community life and conveyed it in collective and individual ways to the people they served.

It is these same lay people who continue to investigate, study and share the rich heritage that has been left to them, by forming local groups keen to develop an understanding of Augustine in his life-long search for God. In this way they renew themselves by following his example and adopting as their own some of the gifts given to him by the Holy Spirit - of which the following article lists three.

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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 centered on the Gospel readings for coming Sundays and quotes from Augustine. Formation material is offered from different sources including a prayer orientated letter from our Chaplain.

Augustine provides a user-friendly Approach to Daily Christian Living.

When the nuns in that Abbey in Austria complained about the behavior of their novice Maria, they wondered aloud "How do you catch a moonbeam in your hand?" We could say the same thing about the topic of Spirituality which seems so abstract and ethereal and certainly beyond the reach of most of us. But in fact it is really a very practical part of our lives.

If, as Aristotle so succinctly put it, "We are what we repeatedly do". then spirituality is what our faith or values look like in the concrete and flows from our personal character and temperament, from our experience and knowledge of life and is expressed by our external behavior. If the thought of this bewilders us there is also help to be gained by the example and wisdom of certain figures in our Christian tradition who can provide a user-friendly way for us to put our spiritual aspirations into practice.

Augustinian spirituality is one of the blue-prints we have been given to aid us in living the Gospel - the following of Christ - under the inspiration of Augustine of Hippo. In his autobiography The Confessions he famously wrote "I looked for you everywhere, and you were within me all the time". Once Augustine realized that God was deeply at the centre of who he was, then he had to admit that this same God was at the centre of everyone he met and was to be revered there. From this insight flow three qualities that puts a very human face on what it means to be a Christian.

The first is that we show **Hospitality** rather than hostility or wariness towards all those we meet. For Augustine, such hospitality took the form of welcoming guests to his table, sharing his knowledge, (and at the same time learning from others), writing a Rule of life for lay people to live safely and happily together, and recognizing that no person is a stranger because of the glimpse he caught of God's familiar presence dwelling in each one of them.

The second quality that Augustine possessed all his life but which deepened in him after his conversion was his capacity for **Friendship**. "When a person is without a friend then not a single thing in the world can appear friendly to them." (Letter 130, 4) He felt that only an increase in friendship could heal our wounds. According to Augustine, true friendship is the welding together of two souls who seek the same goal, especially when that goal is Christ. In Letter 73 he writes: "*I do confess that I find it easy to give myself entirely to the love of those who are my intimate friends. In this love I am completely at ease, because I believe that God is there, on whom I cast myself confidently and in whom I take my rest*".

Following from this it should come as no surprise that the third touchstone of Augustine's spirituality lies in the importance he placed on **Community**. "The only way to bring love into the world is to show it." He believed that the barometer of how well we were getting on with God was how well we were getting on with the members of both our immediate and wider community. "*When you love Christ's members, you love Christ himself. Love cannot be split up. Begin loving somewhere and the rest will follow.*" (1 John 10, 3) He sees our yearning for communion as really a reflection that God is communal – the Trinity in whose image we are made. "*Let all of you then live together in oneness of mind and heart, mutually honouring God in yourselves, whose temples you have become.*" (Rule 1, 8)

We are all called by God to live as Christ's disciples in the community in which we have been placed. It is the insight of Augustine that at the heart of that community is the abiding presence of God whom we are to honour by the way we treat one another with hospitality and friendship. These then become a lived expression of our Christian calling.

Select an insight, phrase or statement from the above description of spirituality that surprises you or appeals to you. How could this be made manifest by what you repeatedly do in your daily life?



From our Chaplain

December 5th. 2007

Dear Friends,

the Season of Advent is a time when each one of us looks back and reviews the year that has so mysteriously evaporated on us to detect its impact, good and bad, on ourselves and our loved ones. It also gives us time to look forward to see in what way the celebration of Christmas this year may be different as a result of those same events which have so thoroughly shaped us. There is an "ever ancient yet ever new" beauty about this Feast when we approach it with the expectation that no matter how worn out we may be, or how content we may have become, this is the chance to welcome God once more into our lives as surly as the shepherds welcomed Jesus into the stable at Bethlehem. In one of his Christmas sermons (each one so unique according to the circumstances surrounding them), St. Augustine exclaims *'Yes Christ was born; may no person ever doubt that he can be reborn'*.

(Sermon 189,3)

We must make room in our hearts, in our lives, so that Jesus can be born anew in us. We must welcome the newness of each day, of every person and situation, because they contain the spark of Christ at the heart of all that is held in existence. The mystery of the Incarnation is the mystery which Augustine returned to throughout his entire life; it is the mystery which reveals the true reality of God to us. The Incarnation of Christ manifests God's willingness to share in our human existence in order to help us return to him. Through the Incarnation of his Son, God bows down towards us and offers his hand to help us up.

"You lift yourself up better if it is the one who never falls who helps you up. The one who never falls came down to you; you had fallen, he descended, he offered you his hand; you couldn't get up on your own: seize the hand of the one who descended to you so that you will be lifted up by the one who is strong." (On Ps 95, 7)

The mystery of the Incarnation reveals to us something of the mystery of St. Augustine's conversion as well as our own. Up until the moment when he surrendered to this mystery, God had been a far-off being existing outside and beyond human comprehension. Only when he understood how God had humbled himself, made himself small in order to be just like us, that Augustine was seized by the understanding of how pervasive God's love was for poor blind humanity. With the coming of his Son into the world God reveals to us the path we must follow that leads infallibly to him.

"I sought the way to attain the strength that would make me able to enjoy you. And I didn't find it until I embraced the Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, as a man who is above all things. . . . He calls out and says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life", so that your Wisdom, by which you have created all things, becomes the milk for our infancy".

(Conf VII, 18, 24)

It is precisely in the Infancy narrative of the Gospels that we discover the key to how God acts in our lives. Not with power or authority that strikes dread in our hearts, but by gently drawing sentiments of courage, love and protectiveness from each adult and child who stand in silent awe around the crib. If the mere presence of a helpless baby can draw such sentiments from the hardest of hearts what does that say about our Creator who makes each one of us in His own Image? The feast of Christmas gives us a glimpse of this God who is still hidden but who longs to reveal himself to us in the course of our journey through life. Perhaps in the midst of the blare and commercialism of the next few weeks we can begin to detect the deeper message contained in the relentless drive for more and more gift-giving? Augustine puts it this way:

"How should we prepare for loving God? By loving each other! You may say to me, "I have not seen God." Can you say to me, "I have not seen a human being?" Love each other! If you love the human whom you see, you will love God too at the same time; for you will see love itself, the love that is the God who dwells within each of us." (Commentary on the Epistle of John ,5.7.2)

When we reach out to others in love, we make true for ourselves the happy fact preached so long ago by Augustine: *"Wherever you go on earth, however long you remain, the Lord is close to you. So don't worry about anything. The Lord is always nearby"* (Sermon 171,5)

May the Feast of Christ's coming 'to be so close to you' be a source of true joy and celebration between you and your family and friends,

With much love,

Paul

Tolle Lege (Take and Read)

Extracts from some Christmas Sermons of St. Augustine.

“Let us celebrate with joy the day on which Mary gave birth to the savior; a married woman to the Creator of marriage, a virgin, to the prince of virgins.” (Sermon 188, 4)

“Let us consider who is this virgin, so holy, that the Holy Spirit deigned to come to her; so beautiful that God chose her for his spouse; so fruitful, that the whole world receives of her bringing forth; so chaste that she is virgin after childbirth.” (Sermon 121, 5)

“. . . . We celebrate this day every year with great solemnity, because on it was fulfilled the prophecy which said, *Truth has sprung from the earth, and Justice has looked forth from heaven* [Ps. 85.11]. Truth, which is in *the bosom of the Father* [Jn. 1:18] has sprung from the earth, in order also to be in the bosom of his mother. Truth, by which the world is held together, has sprung from the earth, in order to be carried in a woman's arms. Truth, which heaven is not big enough to hold, has sprung from the earth, in order to be placed in a manger.” (Sermon 185:1)

“. . . . What praises, then, should we be singing to God's love, what thanks should we be expressing! I mean, he loved us so much that for our sake he came to be in time, though all times were made through him; and he was prepared to be younger in age than many of his servants in the world, though he is older in eternity than all the world. He loved us so much that he became man though he had made man; that he was created from a mother whom he had created, carried in arms he had fashioned, suckled breasts which he himself had filled; that he lay squalling in a manger wordless in infancy, though he is the Word without whom human eloquence would be at a loss for words.” (Sermon 188:2)

“. . . . So, Christians, let us celebrate on this day, not his divine, but his human birth, by which he adapted himself to us, in order that by means of the invisible one made visible we ourselves might pass over from visible things to invisible. Catholic faith, you see, obliges us to accept two births for the Lord, one divine, the other human; the first apart from time, the second in time; both, however, wonderful; The first without mother, the second without father. If we can't grasp this one, when will we ever tell the tale of that one?” (Sermon 190: 2)

“Because Christ is truth and peace and justice, conceive him in faith, give birth to him in works, so that what Mary's womb did for the flesh of Christ, your hearts may do for Christ's law. How, I mean to say, can you have no part in Mary's child bearing when you are members of Christ? Mary gave birth to your Head, the Church gave birth to all of you. Because she too is both virgin and mother; mother in her womb of charity, virgin in the integrity of her faith and piety.” (Sermon 192: 2)

“He was made a sharer in our mortality so that we might become sharers in His divinity. We were made partakers in One unto Life. He became a partaker in many unto death.” (On Ps. 118: 19,6)

“He who was God was made man by taking on what He was not, not by losing what He was ... Let Christ, therefore, lift you up by that which is man in Him; let Him lead you by that which is God-man; let Him guide you through to that which is God”. (On John 23: 6)