

Augustinian Friends - Prayer Resource Guide

Feeding the Hungry: Augustine and the Word.



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From the time St. Augustine first saw the way Bishop Ambrose prayed silently the words of Scripture while alone in the Cathedral at Milan he quietly set about making passages of the Bible the source of his daily prayer. Late into the night he would ponder the meaning of the text not as an intellectual exercise nor for the information he might glean, but as a way of being illumined or graced by the Holy Spirit whom he believed enlightened his understanding just as surely as the original author had been inspired when writing the words down.

Augustine believed that when we come prayerfully to a loving relationship with the inspired Word of God we are as much in God's presence as we are when we meet Christ in the Eucharist. The basic power of the Word is to put each one into the company of the Risen Lord who draws us into a personal relationship with the Father through the Spirit sent to dwell among us. Scripture, in a very real way, becomes the stepping stone or the spring-board that tips us into prayer. The words become the excuse for us to stay in God's presence whether we advert to their literal meaning or not. When we emerge from prayer we carry its refreshment with us.

In one of his Sunday sermons Augustine applies a familiar image to what happens when we use Scripture as our pathway to prayer: "*Don't be lazy, gather the grains from the Lord's threshing-floor, the words of God from the Church of God, gather them and store them away in your heart*". (Sermon 38,2) He tells his people that they are to make their hearts into a nest where the turtle-dove may lay her chicks, an image of God gently placing the living Word into our tender care.

This Word which is proclaimed every day is 'bread for the soul' and Augustine absorbs its meaning first into his own understanding before he shares it with his congregation. "*When I unpack the holy Scriptures for you, it is as though I were breaking open bread for you. You who hunger, receive it. . . . What I deal out to you is not mine. What you eat, I eat. What you live on, I live on. We have in heaven a common store-house, for from it comes the Word of God*". (Sermon 95,1)

Augustine was very patient when it came to waiting for the Word of God to speak to him. His one question which he puts to the text even when it seems to remain as words printed on the page rather than sparks leaping out at him is this: "What is God saying to me NOW that He was not able to say to me yesterday because I was too impatient to listen?" He lets the words take him wherever God wants them to go, or else he sits quietly as with a friend who has fallen silent but has not withdrawn completely. Like the people in the Old Testament he realizes that God has spoken to him once if not many times before and that therefore he will do so again.

Paul Maloney, 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 centered on the Gospel readings and quotes from Augustine. Formation material is offered from different sources including a prayer orientated letter from our Chaplain.

Falling Into the Arms of God

Teresa of Avila gained great insights from reading The Confessions of St. Augustine, particularly his conviction that the place to begin looking for God is within ourselves. Megan Don is a young Australian author who has spent many years studying the works of St. Teresa and this description of ways of praying the 'lectio divina' may be an encouragement to many who are familiar with this practice from our Prayer Resource.

“The Divine Word”

*“For one word of His will contains within itself
a thousand mysteries, and thus our understanding
is only very elementary”.*

(Combined Works vol. II, 217)

An age-old Christian meditation practice is that called *Lectio Divina* (the Divine Word). In this practice you sit quietly with the scriptures or a work relating to the spirit and ask for guidance in your meditation. Upon opening the book you allow your gaze to fall gently on the page until a particular word or phrase catches your attention. Closing your eyes you softly repeat this word or phrase over and over, allowing it to become part of your breath and to penetrate deep within your body.

You allow yourself to be taken into a deep meditative state, and from this place the Word of God becomes alive in you. Your whole body and soul are given a new understanding of this one word or phrase that you have been guided to. Through this transmission your life becomes altered in some way. If you take the same word or phrase tomorrow, and the day after that, and enter into this practice, you may be given another understanding, and another, each affecting your life in a different way. This is what Teresa meant when she said that one word of God contains a thousand mysteries.

Teresa practiced this method of meditation using the Lord's Prayer. She would quietly sit with eyes closed and slowly begin reciting the prayer, allowing the words to guide her. Whenever a particular word or phrase drew her deeper within, she would follow. For instance, repeating 'daily bread' over and over, she would allow herself to become absorbed by these words and let God reveal to her one of their many mysteries. In this way she came to know that divine love was her daily manna and sustenance, and that without it she would be unable to live. The connection she was making and living every day with God *was* her daily bread. As she moved into this larger reality, the worries of her smaller life and concerns about literal loaves of bread would dissolve.

The words written through divine inspiration are there for our benefit. Let us take advantage of yet another way in which God seeks to communicate with us. Let us move from the barrage of copious external information to a few words of divine wisdom., allowing our internal source to guide us into the greater mysteries of God.

Meditation

*Take time to sit quietly alone with a book of inspiration or spiritual teaching
Ask that you be guided to the word or phrase most needed for you right now.
Alternatively, you may simply ask that a word or phrase be given to you.
Begin softly repeating it over and over, allowing it to fill your whole body and mind.
Allow its wisdom to come forth, and accept it with every cell of your body.*

Give thanks.

(Falling into the Arms of God: “Meditations with Teresa of Avila”. by Megan Don, p. 115-16
New World Library, Novato, California 2005)



From our Chaplain

June 22nd. 2008

Dear Friends,

there are electronic signs all over Sydney telling us how many days there are before we will be celebrating WYD 2008 with an expected crowd of several hundred thousand pilgrims. The experience of standing in solidarity with such a large gathering of like minded people will surely have a lasting impact on the hearts and minds of many of the participants. It seems to me that we have had a similar experience - described in so many different ways in the columns of the current *Amici* - in the virtual community that formed to share "One World Week with Augustine". It is no accident that the topic we discussed was on the theme of 'Friendship' which will be the paramount experience of the many young people gathered from all over the world in just a few weeks time.

As we know, St. Augustine was forever surrounded by friends from the time of his youth. One of the earliest of these was a boy named Severus. They were both born at Thagaste around the same time and shared many adventures and discoveries together, including the first time they were introduced to the mysterious workings of a magnet. They were stupefied! Severus joined the community that formed around Augustine when he returned to Thagaste, but they were separated once more when he was sent from there to be Bishop of Milevis for the last thirty years of his life.

The deep affection they shared as boys lasted all their lives long as Augustine confides to his old friend: *"When I am praised by someone who is utterly genuine and close to my soul, I consider it as if I were praised by myself. ... You are my other soul - in fact your soul and mine are one - and you are for me the first of those who are very dear and close to me in the name of Christ. May the Lord our God fill the great and holy bosom of your heart, which he himself has made". (Letter 110)*

In the course of the years the busy routine of their lives kept them on separate tracks and Augustine was heard to complain: *"My most dear friend and fellow citizen Severus hardly ever writes to me now, and when he does it is only on scraps of paper, and most of these are filled with news of other people's cares and troubles."* In spite of this he is still able to confirm *"... the bond of friendship by which Severus and I are bound to each other, and you nonetheless know how rarely it happens that I see him!" (Letter 84)*

Augustine has commented in a number of letters and sermons on the sense of happiness we experience when a friend visits us (or communicates on email or by phone), how this carries with it not only *their* love but the caring hand of God for us as well. In the preparation time leading up to "One World Week with Augustine" and in the several gatherings I attended where we discussed the delights of friendship, it began to dawn on me how neglectful I had become of many of my oldest friends. Like Severus, I hardly ever write and when I do it is about trivial matters rather than the true communication that such a long association demands. It is one thing to bask in the warmth of agreeable companionship offered by those near at hand but quite a different matter to make the effort to be of comfort to those who are far away in time and place. I have found myself apologizing to a number of people for my silence, the result, I hope, not of indifference but from a preoccupation with day to day trivia. I drew comfort from one of the quotes offered for our consideration: *"You love your friends if you hate what hurts or damages them"*. With some relief I realized it would take only the slightest hint that they were in trouble for me to do all in my power to help them.

May the bonds of friendship which so recently united us in our talks and discussions provide the platform from which we can welcome the many youth coming to our shores,

with much love,

Paul

Tolle Lege (Take and Read)

BENEDICT XVI

“If I pray I am never totally alone” - Spe Salvi (no. 32)

“We should recall
that no man is an island
entire of itself.

Our lives are involved with one another -
through innumerable interactions they are linked
together.

No one lives alone.
No one sins alone.
No one is saved alone.

The lives of others continually spill over into mine
in what I think, say, do or achieve.

And conversely,
my life spills over into that of others,
for better and for worse.

So my prayer for another is not something extraneous
to that person, something external - not even after
death.

In the interconnectedness of Being,
my gratitude to the other - my prayer for them -
can play a small part in their purification

It is never too late to touch the heart of another,
nor is it ever in vain.

In this way we further clarify an important element
of the Christian concept of hope.

Our hope is always essentially also hope for others;
Only thus is it truly hope for me too”

— Spe Salvi (2007), no. 48