

# Augustinian Friends - Prayer Resource Guide

## From our Chaplain

October 10th. 2009

Dear Friends,

In my last letter to you I included a few words from the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (much quoted by our present Prime Minister), who suggested *"There is a meaning in every journey unknown to the traveler"*. By that he means it is only when we return from our adventures and reflect on all that happened during our weeks away that the picture becomes clearer and we realize something very special has occurred. The first question asked when I returned from our September "Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of Augustine" was "What was it like for you during those busy days?" Not, 'What did you see?' or 'Where did you go?', but rather "How were you changed by the experience?"

The answer came to me a few days later and I found myself thinking 'It was a life-fulfilling event.' In all my years as an Augustinian there has been a longing to visit the holy places of our Order, but I hardly dared think that I could stay in the town where Augustine was born, or visit the actual Cathedral site and see where he sat and taught the people as their bishop for over 30 years! When the plane landed in North Africa in all its strangeness I had the strongest feeling that I had 'come home'. The world that Augustine made so alive in his writing was suddenly under our feet and we were seeing with our own eyes what he would have seen with his. Nowhere was this more true than when we stood in the ruins of the church in Carthage where Monica prayed and wept while her son stole away on a ship to try out a new teaching career in Rome. The wind that filled his sails was in our faces and the dazzling sun shining off the water that brought tears to her eyes did the same to ours.

The other moment when I felt amazingly close to him was when we discovered that the columns surrounding his 'Basilica of Peace' were decorated either at their base (or as supports to the roof) with blocks of stone beautifully carved with what our Muslim Guide airily described as "Augustine's heart". The emblem that I thought we adopted in the Middle Ages when the Order became a legal entity has actually existed and been a link between us and Bishop Augustine from the very beginning!

Finally, I would like to thank the ten other pilgrims who accompanied me on our marathon journey. Their companionship, good humour and delight in what we were experiencing gave real meaning to what it means to 'travel together' on our way to God,

With much love,



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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 and quotes from Augustine. Formation material is offered from different sources including a prayer orientated letter from our Chaplain.

A Pilgrim's Progress  
Reflections on the Highlights of our Journey  
from each of the Participants

First three days in the City of Milan and the surrounding Province of Lombardy:

“One of the highlights of the many special places we visited was early in the tour—and lay in Pavia where we visited the Basilica of San Pietro - “St. Peter of the Golden Sky” - where the body of Saint Augustine is enshrined.

We were given an enthusiastic and informative description of the life of Augustine by an Augustinian Father (who was a classmate of Fr. Peter Jones) as it is depicted in the sculptured panels surrounding his monument. This in itself was a work of art and beautifully conveyed his lovely story.

Fr. Peter said Mass in honour of Our Lady of Consolation, making our visit all the more meaningful”,

**Bev Boroughs.**

... “It was so special just to think that we were in the presence of St. Augustine’s body while we offered Mass and prayed. An incredible experience.

Before Mass while waiting for our Augustinian host to come, we sat in the beautiful courtyard with lovely shady trees and chatted, which St. Augustine liked to do with his friends”.

**Lenore Girard**

“It is difficult to say what is the highlight of this pilgrimage as there have been so many!

Perhaps the visit to Cassago Brianza - Cassiciacum - to the area where Augustine spent one year preparing for Baptism in a place that is so beautiful. It was inspiring to see the fig trees, hear the running water and to sense the respect given to all things associated with St. Augustine.

An ongoing blessing of our pilgrimage was the generous gifts of friendship and care shared within our group by all, richly demonstrated by our pastors.

But most of all for me was the experience of seeing Annaba (from our 10th floor balcony) at sunset on the last day of Rammadam when gifts would be exchanged the next day. The call to prayer from the mosques around the city sounded beautiful, and the glowing light from St. Augustine’s Basilica on the hill brightened as the night came on. I saw this glowing as an unopened gift to the people from God through Augustine. May God bless this country”.

**Lenore Sullivan**

Next five days in the town of San Gimignano and the surrounding Province of Tuscany:

A continuing thread throughout this pilgrimage has been the hospitality of all the members of the Augustinian community - beginning, of course, with Peter Jones and Paul Maloney who have led us with loving care and attention in both our physical and spiritual journeys.

At all our visits to sites of significance in the life of Augustine and the Order various members of the community (men and women) have welcomed us most warmly and have been extraordinarily generous in sharing their insights into the story and tradition of the Augustinians.

Our stay at the Convento in San Gimignano epitomized this aspect of our journey. The opportunity to live with an Augustinian community enriched our journey immeasurably. Their hospitality was outstanding. Brian Lowery was very generous with his time as he shared his knowledge of Augustine and particularly the Hermitages in the area. . . .

The following five days in Rome and significant Augustinian sites at Ostia and Genazzano:

. . . .Special mention must also be made of the wonderful morning provided by James Downey and Tony Eagan at St. Patrick’s Church in Rome where they told us something of the 300 year history of the Irish Augustinians in that city. Their morning tea almost outrivaled the magnificent lunch provided for us at St. Monica’s where we were treated royally after the Papal Audience. Meeting all these people enriched our pilgrimage enormously.

**Ann Brindle**

“Ostia Antica: entry and disembarkation harbor to ancient Rome - the Tiber’s original entry to the sea. Augustine came and went from here on a number of occasions, indeed his mother died here. The site was clearly laid out and it was easy to relate and envisage the colony as it would have existed when the population of Rome was between 80,00 up to one million people. Running off from the cobble main street you could see the vendors markets with mosaics depicting the nature of their business, the Amphitheatre, baths, houses symmetrically laid out and ruts in the road still visible from the carts that had passed over them so many centuries ago. A remarkable glimpse into the world as Augustine knew it.”

**Ian Boroughs**

*Last three days of our Journey spent in North Africa, specifically Tunisia and Algeria:*

“While looking over the new Annaba which was ancient Hippo in Augustine’s time of being its Bishop, I am reflecting on the highlights of our “Augustinian Friends Pilgrimage”. So many places, words and images flash through my mind from the last twenty-one days, and they are all memorable. My warmest and most enduring memory is the welcome and hospitality we received from every Augustinian that we met along the way. There was always a readiness to share their particular story or charism and to extend a genuine invitation for us to come back again. The fact that Peter Jones was renewing contacts from his student days was one reason for this, but not the only one. The reason for our coming together was to live out our love of God and our neighbor. It was a great pilgrimage - not of strangers - but brothers and sisters on the journey.”

**Ray Mitchell**

“Every day of our special Augustinian Friends Pilgrimage was a wonderful experience and there were many highlights. Just to choose one, I loved our visit to Carthage and the Basilica of St. Cyprian in Sidi Bou Said. We sat down amidst the ancient ruins while Fr. Paul read relevant passages from “The Confessions”. He told us how St. Monica prayed and cried all through the night because her son had left for Rome without her. It was amazing to think that we were in the exact place where this happened so many years ago. A man with a physical disability followed us into the site and it turned out he was the caretaker of the area. He seemed so proud of his job.

**Karleen and Elizabeth O’Reilley**

“There are many aspects of the pilgrimage that have touched me deeply. For the purpose of this reflection I highlight our meeting with Fr. Raphael Abdilla in Annaba towards the end of the pilgrimage. Raphael is presently the only friar in the land of Augustine and has been alone for some time. I was moved by his faith, humility, appreciation of community and his courage. He spoke of the value of a ministry of *presence* of the Order in the place where Augustine was Bishop for 35 years. I also reflected on the value of his ministry of friendship with the people of Algeria among whom he lives.”

**Peter Jones OSA**

“The most significant (among many) experiences for me personally during our Augustinian Friends Pilgrimage was the meeting with Fr. Raphael OSA - a saintly Maltese Augustinian priest who for the past 7 years has been caring for the Basilica of St. Augustine overlooking Annaba. He has a small flock of Christians to whom he ministers alone with great devotion, keeping the flame of Christianity flickering in a huge Moslem country.

Fr. Raphael’s philosophy echoes St. Augustine’s - living each day to the best of one’s ability, existing, with God’s help, and leaving tomorrow in His hands. Father said he has learnt a great deal from the Arabic people - including great patience and the acceptance of God’s will. This priest and his small flock of brave Christians following in the footsteps of St. Augustine deserve our prayers.

**Pam Eagles**

*[Each of the pilgrims experienced a sense that we were a “group of friends travelling together on our way to God”. This theme is picked up by a fellow Augustinian, Fr. Paul Morrissey from the Philadelphia Province who shared some days with us in Italy as well as the thoughts expressed on the back page.]*

# Together To God

## The Augustinian Spiritual Journey

### *But, Why Not Me?*

This question, in the mouth of a friend of Augustine's, is the key to understanding Augustinian Spirituality. In Book Eight of his *Confessions*, Augustine describes himself in a garden in Milan before he finally took the step to commit himself wholly to Jesus Christ and to be baptized. In one of the most dramatic conversion stories in Christian history, Augustine describes how he is struggling with all of his sexual passions; he can not become chaste as he wishes. While in the midst of this inner struggle, he tells us, "a mighty storm arose in me, bringing a mighty rain of tears." He leaps up and runs into a remote section of the garden. While sobbing out of control under a fig tree, he hears a child's voice singing over and over again, *Tolle, lege, tolle lege*, which means "Pick it up and read it." Augustine experiences this as a message to him from God. He returns to the bench where he had been reading St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. He seized the book, opened it, and read silently the first text he found: *Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the flesh in its concupiscences.* (Romans 13:13) "A light of utter confidence shone in my heart," he tells us. "All the darkness of uncertainty vanished."

It is a stunning story, perhaps even polished up to grab our attention and lure us in as we read it. Except for the opening line, there is one significant feature left out of this summary. I believe it to be at the heart of understanding Augustine and Augustinian Spirituality. **During this dramatic encounter with God, Augustine's dear friend, Alypius, was sitting on the garden bench nearby.** To ignore this, or to erase the conversation between Augustine and Alypius which followed, is to miss the unique gift to the Church that Augustine and Augustinian Spirituality offers.

"Then leaving my finger in the place or marking it by some other sign, I closed the book and in complete calm told the whole thing to Alypius and he similarly told me what had been going on in himself, of which I knew nothing." And I here paraphrase what Alypius asked his friend in so many words: *But, why not me?* He asked to see what Augustine had read. Augustine showed him the passage from St. Paul. "He looked further than I had read," Augustine tells us, "I had not known what followed. And this is what followed: Make room for the person who is weak in faith." (Romans 14:1, tr. Boulding) Alypius applied this to himself and told Augustine so. "And he was confirmed by this message, and with no trouble wavering gave himself to God's good will and purpose." Augustine and Alypius are converted together.

Except possibly for the Emmaus story (Luke 24:13), this is the only story I have heard of where two people are converted together. It offers a model of a spiritual journey that is of great importance to the Church today. In contrast to the *individual* person or soul's journey to God—the classic model of the spiritual life made famous by St. Ignatius and St. Teresa of Avila—the Augustinian way is to travel *together* to God. In fact, Augustine describes earlier in the Book Eight mentioned above how he and Alypius were told a similar story of two young men who were converted by reading the story of St. Antony of the Desert together, and how they had given up everything to follow Christ. It seems very likely that Augustine wanted to evoke the same reaction in the readers of his *Confessions*. Hearing another person's story of how God changed his once lost heart can be the flame that ignites the hearer to discover God calling him or herself. This is how the Gospel has moved people through the centuries. It is how Augustine changed. It is even more powerful when two are changed in this way. And so Augustine hopes that in ones *and twos* we will be touched by his conversion as we hear the story of his exploding heart. ***Together to God***—the Augustinian Way.

To make this point unforgettable, in Book Nine of his *Confessions*, Augustine describes how he had a similarly profound religious experience with his mother, Monica, at his side. They too were near a garden. The famous painting hanging in the Louvre in Paris even portrays the two of them hand in hand. Isn't it clear that, for Augustine, sharing our faith journey together in the deepest way is the path to God? This is the main rationale for the liturgy. We worship together in community to experience God together. There are many other examples of how we are already doing this, but the present moment in our Church's history seems ready-made to claim the ***Together to God*** image for Augustine, and for ourselves as his followers. The more we understand and practice this pathway to continuing conversion, the more we can help others use this image to complement the classic conversion models of an individual soul and God. Finally, for those of us who take vows to live as Augustinians, we have to admit that living together in "community," and praying together, does not necessarily mean the deep and Scriptural sharing of souls and hearts that Augustine demonstrates in his *Confessions*—*Anima una et cor unum in Deo*. But we can identify this path as our ideal, and we can try.

*Together to God*—but, why not me?  
Why not us?

Paul F. Morrissey, OSA, D.Min.