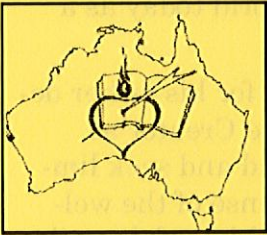


June 2011

AUGUSTINIAN FRIENDS - PRAYER RESOURCE GUIDE

LETTER FROM OUR CHAPLAIN

June 13th. 2011



Dear Friends,

On my recent visit to the Friend's groups in North Queensland and Brisbane we looked at the way Augustine viewed the world as a "graced reality" speaking to us of God's place and plan for Nature in all of its complexity. He thought if the human race simply opened its eyes it would soon discover traces of the divine written on every page of the book of creation.

Once Augustine moved away from the errors of the Manichean philosophy that taught 'matter' was derived from a pre-existing deity who contained only darkness and evil, he came to accept the idea that if all creation was "from nothing", brought about by a good and loving God, then all creation was good and spoke to us of the harmony God has implanted in all things.

"The world is not like a structure of rooms which remains standing even when its builder departs and is gone; but the world would vanish in the blink of an eye if God removed his governance from it".
(Augustine: Chapter 12, "The Literal Meaning of Genesis")

The diversity of creation, from the multitude of stars in the heavens, the variety of species of birds and animals on the earth even to the tiniest of insects, all gives rise to a sense of wonder and awe in our hearts. But this awe can turn to dismay when we realize how fast the global crisis clock has started to tick. We are losing many species as the planet continues to warm, and we are disturbing the surface of the globe with the removal of billions of tons of earth and minerals far more quickly than the millions of years it has taken to bring about change through erosion, the movement off glaciers and the natural shifting of the earth's tectonic plates.

To the extent that this is the result of human activity it is a man-made problem. As such, if there is a solution (even a reversal) it is also in our reach. We don't have to escape into pessimism or become climate skeptics as is always the temptation when we confront something bigger than we think we can handle. We cannot negotiate with nature any more than we can rewrite the human psyche. Both need to be accepted as they are and then worked on. Then the problems we think we can't possibly handle spurs us on to discover new horizons of wisdom that we never knew before.

(continued overleaf)

Augustinians On-Line

www.augustinians.org.au

Stay in touch with the latest news from the Augustinian community through the Province's website. Details of upcoming events in Augustinian spirituality and in parishes and schools around the country can be found on this easy to use site.

Links to local lay Augustinian associations and the international community can also be found on this site.

www.augnet.org

Augnet is a website containing a total of 1,800 pages about Augustine's life and work, and about history and activities of the Order of Saint Augustine. It contains pages on Augustinian Friends in Australia and England.

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Great changes have occurred before on this planet. In the past, however, it had ten million years to adapt to times of mass extinction. Our crisis today is that we have learned to speed everything up so much that the forces of change outstrips even our imagination. Environmentally we see evidence in the strong possibility of the West Arctic ice sheet collapsing in the next few decades. Socially we are witnessing the unpredictable "Arab Spring" that burst upon the geo-political world and continues to demand changes that run far ahead of what was expected. Today the pace, uncertainty and huge interconnectedness of the global tipping points - from food, soil and water, to biodiversity and financial systems - confronts us with the need for what many Religious leaders are calling 'a new holiness'. Such a graced perspective is as necessary to the world today as a plague stricken town needs doctors!

The individual person can no longer escape from taking responsibility for his or her decisions and actions. We can choose to live with and form a bond with the Creator as partners in the ongoing unfolding of our world; or we can sever that bond and seek limited goals and immediate satisfaction for our material needs at the expense of the welfare of many others who will inherit our planet in the future - to say nothing of the millions starving in what we call the Third World at the moment.

The new holiness required of us is not so new, it has always been with us. Saint Augustine told his congregation that when we come into this world the table of God's plenty is set before us. What we must do is share with others what we ourselves have freely been given. If we are to gather more than we need at the expense of another person's share, then he tells us "You are robbing the poor". And when we die we take none of this with us, it remains for the next generation to benefit from, so why be wasteful or selfish now?

Over these last few weeks a group of parents, teachers and students from St. Augustine's College in Sydney have been gathering medical supplies, teaching aids, clothing and goods to be sent to an orphanage in the Philippines run by the Augustinian Sisters of Consolation. The response to this appeal has surprised many of the organisers who will have to find larger containers to cope with all that has been donated. Radical questions about quality of life and a just sharing of natural resources are as much a part of solving the environmental crisis as pursuing the science of carbon reduction or alternative forms of energy.

In educating ourselves in these areas we will be taking up the challenge to be partners with God in the future that is being created and we will also be heeding the call of Pope Benedict XVI who declared:

"It is imperative that humanity renews and strengthens that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying".

Although we may be in the process of destroying much of what we have come to treasure as a gift from God and God's subtle way of revealing glimpses of His Beauty to us, we still have time to tip the scales back to a balance in which we become partners with God in the very future that is being created with, or without, our help. This world matters and it matters to God who created it and it matters to Jesus who redeemed it and the Holy Spirit who moves ceaselessly in its depths —

With much love,

