

# Friends of St. Augustine - Prayer Resource Guide

## From our Chaplain

December 6th. 2012

Dear Friends,

The Season of Advent could not have come at a better time as we agonize over events confronting the Church throughout the world, but especially here in Australia. As has happened in Ireland and the United States we are now faced with the scrutiny of a Royal Commission into the abuse of children by Institutions and the concomitant self-protective and defensive behavior of some of those placed in authority. Many hope this enquiry will do for the Church what the Church could not do for itself.

When I read articles in the press or watch interviews on T.V. the image I have is of Christ seated in the Praetorium with a purple robe covering his nakedness and his head bowed in pain from the blows to the crown made out of thorns delivered so energetically by the brutal soldiers. He was the innocent victim, and so are the majority of Catholics, clergy and laity, who suffer the same sense of loss at the thought that perhaps now His saving message can too easily be dismissed.

And so the Season of Advent could not have come at a better time because we are so much in need of the coming of Him whose mission it is to save us and re-ignite in us a fire fuelled wonderfully by the Holy Spirit. As St. Augustine tells us in his famous book **The City of God (22,23)**

*'We must watch against the danger . . . that in this conflict, so full of toil and danger, we should expect to win the victory by our own strength, or ascribe a victory, when won, to our own strength instead of attributing it to the grace of him, who, as the Apostle says, 'gives the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ; let us thank God for it' (1Cor 15,57). Or as he says in another place, 'From all these trials we emerge triumphant through the strength of him who loved us'. (Romans 8.37) "*

The Advent of Christ into human history has been transforming our spiritual landscape in every age as he subtly prepares the grounds for a better future. The Advent season recalling such an ongoing event sensitizes us to the presence within our every-day lives of the one who is, historically, the son of God and the son of Mary; it reminds us that he will return and take us with him; and it powerfully reassures us that he is with us now in the midst of darkness, sadness and bewilderment, to be the kind and comforting instrument of God at work in our lives as their gift of Grace given,

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.

## “Advent Speaks to the Power of Smallness”

By Joan Chittister

It's Advent again. And if anyone cares about Advent, we should!

Advent may have more to do with our life than any other season of the year. Yet, Advent remains the period of spiritual preparation that is too often least appreciated, little understood and commonly ignored.

One of the problems with Advent is that it gets swallowed up by Christmas. The truth is, of course, that Advent signals the coming of Christmas, but a different kind of Christmas from the one we celebrate as a First World country. That kind of Christmas is about storing up of things. The Christmas to which Advent points is about being emptied out so we can become full.

The two great liturgical seasons of the church year, Advent and Lent, are about very different things. Advent is not 'a little Lent'. Advent is not a penitential period. Advent comes to trigger consciousness, not to provoke consciences.

The Talmud teaches that every person should wear a jacket with two pockets. In one pocket, the rabbis said, there should be a note that reads, "*I am a worm and not completely human*". And in the second pocket, the rabbis say, the note must read, "*For me the universe was made.*" The story is clear: the function of Lent is to remind us who we are - and who we are not. The function of Advent is to remind us who God is and who we are meant to be as well. To stand with hands open and empty in the face of such plenitude. The God who comes without retinue or riches is the metaphor of a humility that requires us to remember how really small we are in the universe - and to come to the point where that is enough for us.

Advent is about the power of emptiness and the spiritual meaning of smallness.

When we have little to begin with, we have even less to lose. We know, then, that we don't have all the ideas or all the answers. It means that we have nothing to fight over and even less to boast about in life. We become full of possibility.

When we know who we really are, when we present no disguises and parade no pretensions, when we are honest both with ourselves and with others, we find ourselves free to be ourselves. We have no image to keep up, no lies to gild in a gilded society. We become full of integrity.

When we learn to live with the basics rather than to hoard what does not belong to us, we can never be made bereft by the loss of life's little baubles because we never depended on them in the first place. We become full of contentment.

When we recognize our own limitations, we need never fear failure. Then we can't possibly be destroyed by losing because we never anointed ourselves entitled to win. We become full of confidence.

Finally, when Advent seeps into our souls, we come to understand that small is not nothing and empty is not bereft. Smallness bonds us to the rest of the human race and frees us from the arrogant isolation that kills both the body and the soul. To be empty is to be available inside in order to attend to something other than the self. We become full of the blessings of life.

From this vantage point of becoming aware of our own smallness we may have the heart to identify with those whose poverty and paucity of life is involuntary. Then we may be able to become full human beings ourselves, full of compassion and full of consciousness.

An Advent spent in serious reflection on the power of emptiness and the meaning of smallness puts everything else in perspective. Most of all, ourselves. Or, as Isaiah put it: "*The eye of the arrogant will be humbled and the pride of mortals brought low*".