

Friends of St. Augustine - Prayer Resource Guide

From our Chaplain

September 10th. 2013

Dear Friends,

the Movement of People throughout history and particularly in Biblical times was a topic of great interest at a recent Social Justice Symposium sponsored by our Australian Province early in July of this year. It highlighted a theology of migration that consistently influences the spirituality of Augustine who speaks of life as a journey on the way to God, a moving forward in hope between the borders of Christ's first and second coming, between the present life and the life to come, between the earthly Babylon to the heavenly Jerusalem. The migrant experience gives expression to the transitory nature of existence and to the courage needed to move forward amid the risks, sufferings and disappointments of life.

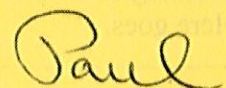
The sacking of Rome in 410 precipitated an influx of refugees into North Africa who needed to be cared for by the local inhabitants. Augustine was one of the first to put out his hand to help the asylum seekers and emancipated slaves.

"You do not know what others will be with God; you do not know how God has foreknown them ... These people therefore who are not yet members of the Church (or our country) are hidden neighbours of ours ... Consequently let us who do not know the future accept each and every person as a neighbour". (Second Homily on Psalm 25. 2)

Augustine and the Church in every age provides us with a theological understanding of what it means to take on the mind and heart of Christ in dealing with the plight of today's migrants. The encyclical *"Gaudium et spes"* states that no one should be denied the right to food, clothing or shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family; the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information and rightful freedom even in matters of religion. (no. 26). Hopefully people can meet such needs in their homeland, but when these conditions are not met, as John XXIII noted, people have a right to emigrate in order to "more fittingly provide a future for themselves and their family." (*Pacem et terris no. 106*)

The situation in today's world where one in thirty-five people are regarded as displaced by war, famine or religious persecution challenges each of us in Australia who have this compassionate, Christian point of view to raise our voices to God (and to our Government) and in Augustine's words pray: *"You rescue us from our wretched meanderings and establish us on your way; you console us and bid us to 'Run: I will carry you, I will lead you and I will bring you home'".* (*Confessions VI, 16, 26*)

With much love,



Inside this issue:

Chaplain's Letter	1
Augustinian Spirituality as the basis for our acting Justly in today's world.: The PNG Solution and Asylum Seekers	2
By Fr. John Murray OSA	3
Sermon given by St. Augustine as an explanation of Psalm 25 (Pt. 2, No. 4)	4
A fragment of Sermon 311, 8.	

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.

Augustinian Spirituality as the Basis for our Acting Justly in the Modern World

THE PNG SOLUTION AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

This timely article was volunteered by John Murray O.S.A. (Australian Province), who has ministered in Thailand, (increasingly with refugees living in Bangkok), who offers us a reality check. on what has become an embittered debate in our nation.

Following [Prime Minister] Kevin Rudd's announcement at the end of last week of his PNG Solution for asylum seekers coming by boat to Australia, I keenly watched Q&A last night on Australia Network as I knew what the big item of the night would be and it was.

What I heard from the politicians representing both sides was well chosen language. They talked of needing 'orderly migration', of there being a queue for coming to Australia, of the evil of people smugglers who need to be stopped. They chose to focus on the people smugglers and their evil, saying this is all about stopping them. What they said relies on there being a good system in place under UNHCR for processing refugee claims.

It struck me that their language took the focus off those who are at the centre of this – the refugees. I would ask, why not deal with the refugees and then you deal with the other issues? I recognise this is a huge ask and know that there is no simplistic response. I know it is all beyond the good will and intent of any one nation – in this case Australia. What politicians did say on Q&A that did make sense was that the world refugee issue is beyond Australia's capabilities but this was never an Australian issue. It is rather a world issue which the world community faces through and with the UN.

It made me reflect on the urban refugees I know in Bangkok and their situation in being here, while waiting for a new life after having fled war or persecution or threats to their life.

What I can say from my work and ministry here is that migration is not orderly. That is not how it happens here. People are not buying tickets and applying for visas to come to Thailand. Those from Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and elsewhere nearby coming in search of a livelihood and opportunity, just come. The Burmese in the camps and the urban refugees in Bangkok just flee and come as they can to get away from the evil and fear they know at home.

Those seeking asylum get here and they face long waits and a time of great hardship in a country that is not a signatory to the UN Convention on refugees. Fact is that Australia is one of the few countries in the whole region that is a signatory to this convention. They may become refugees but under Thai law, they are unwanted visa over-stayers and as such face possible detention and corrupt police practices and cannot legally find employment or easily access basic services. In this situation, they do not enjoy their rights as human beings. In the midst of this, I know of no queue for Australia and see no great orderly system under UNHCR, which is facing its own chaos, to deal with these people.

What is lost sight of is that asylum seekers and refugees are real life people, like you and me. They have faced desperate situations back home and have fled to seek a safe and new future for themselves and their families. It is only what you or I would do under the same circumstances. They are desperate and do what they need to do for their families. It is all very tragic but also very human.

From where I stand, the political debate in Australia seems to have lost touch with the reality of those who are at the very centre of this debate. Here I share some notes I kept of a recent interagency meeting that I attended consisting of those helping urban refugees. They are offered as a help in understanding what is being faced on the ground from another perspective. The meeting was held on 18th May. Here goes.



BASRAN (Bangkok Asylum Seeker and Refugee Assistance Network) had its now regular meeting. This network is a wide and all inclusive network that takes in all churches, NGOs and individuals and groups helping urban refugees in partnership with UNHCR.

At the meeting, UNHCR Bangkok shared the following.

It is facing a financial crisis. This is due to the increasing number of crises in the world it has to deal with and its own budget being cut 50%.

UNHCR is undertaking its own cutbacks in provision of services and assistance to the urban refugee population. These cutbacks are across the board.

Since April, UNHCR has been looking at further cuts. Nothing has been decided with UNHCR considering its options.

While there will be further cuts, UNHCR stands by the extremely vulnerable cases and the need to support them.

For 2012, there were 1,000 new entries into Thailand seeking asylum. Already 2013 has seen that number arrive with an expected total 2013 arrival of 2,500.

The big number is Christians from Pakistan fleeing persecution at the hands of extremist Muslims and those fleeing the war in Syria.

At present, there are approximately 1,200 refugees and 1,300 asylum seekers.

Resettlement takes time and so the people are here for a long period of time.

This gives a hint of what dealing with the urban refugee population involves – increasing need, growing numbers and fewer resources which are already limited. It is hugely challenging and frustrating for all concerned. There is no orderly system at play and people are about survival in a harsh community environment where the process can so easily result in their losing their own dignity and respect. The system here is no benchmark for applying elsewhere.

I trust this helps understanding and adds to a needed reality check in the midst of what is being discussed back home.

*John Murray osa
Bangkok – 23rd July 2013.*

The Jesuit Refugee Service Slams Asylum Seeker Policies in Australia.

Mr. Oliver White, who is the Head of Policy and Advocacy for JRS Australia has issued a scathing assessment of both major parties in the lead up to this month's elections. "Australia is the lone signatory among signatory nations to the UN Convention on Refugees to deny people asylum based on their mode of arrival. Those who arrive by boat in Australia are put in detention and (under policies announced as part of the election) have an uncertain future with few rights and no chance of permanent settlement - in contrast to the 80,000 plus who arrive by boat or plane each year on short term tourist or student visas and are free to live in the community and eventually settle here".

The Jesuit Refugee Service firmly believes the principle of deterrence or of 'no advantage' - by which members of one group of people who have come to Australia to seek protection are treated harshly in order to modify the behaviour of others - should form no part of the Australian policy.

"No single measure will stop boat arrivals in Australia" Mr. White says. "Rather than 'stopping the boats' being the core objective of the major parties, what is needed is a regional approach to managing the movements of people that places the protection of asylum seekers ahead of national politics and border protection".

Friends of St. Augustine - Prayer Resource Guide

From our Chaplain

September 10th. 2013

Dear Friends,

the Movement of People throughout history and particularly in Biblical times was a topic of great interest at a recent Social Justice Symposium sponsored by our Australian Province early in July of this year. It highlighted a theology of migration that consistently influences the spirituality of Augustine who speaks of life as a journey on the way to God, a moving forward in hope between the borders of Christ's first and second coming, between the present life and the life to come, between the earthly Babylon to the heavenly Jerusalem. The migrant experience gives expression to the transitory nature of existence and to the courage needed to move forward amid the risks, sufferings and disappointments of life.

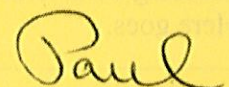
The sacking of Rome in 410 precipitated an influx of refugees into North Africa who needed to be cared for by the local inhabitants. Augustine was one of the first to put out his hand to help the asylum seekers and emancipated slaves.

"You do not know what others will be with God; you do not know how God has foreknown them ... These people therefore who are not yet members of the Church (or our country) are hidden neighbours of ours ... Consequently let us who do not know the future accept each and every person as a neighbour". (Second Homily on Psalm 25. 2)

Augustine and the Church in every age provides us with a theological understanding of what it means to take on the mind and heart of Christ in dealing with the plight of today's migrants. The encyclical *"Gaudium et spes"* states that no one should be denied the right to food, clothing or shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family; the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information and rightful freedom even in matters of religion. (no. 26). Hopefully people can meet such needs in their homeland, but when these conditions are not met, as John XXIII noted, people have a right to emigrate in order to "more fittingly provide a future for themselves and their family." (*Pacem et terris no. 106*)

The situation in today's world where one in thirty-five people are regarded as displaced by war, famine or religious persecution challenges each of us in Australia who have this compassionate, Christian point of view to raise our voices to God (and to our Government) and in Augustine's words pray: *"You rescue us from our wretched meanderings and establish us on your way; you console us and bid us to 'Run: I will carry you, I will lead you and I will bring you home'".* (*Confessions VI, 16, 26*)

With much love,



Inside this issue:

Chaplain's Letter	1
Augustinian Spirituality as the basis for our acting Justly in today's world.: The PNG Solution and Asylum Seekers	2
By Fr. John Murray OSA	3
Sermon given by St. Augustine as an explanation of Psalm 25 (Pt. 2, No. 4)	4
A fragment of Sermon 311, 8.	

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.