

Friends of St. Augustine - Prayer Resource Guide

From our Chaplain

March 1st. 2014

Dear Friends,

by my estimation I have been Chaplain to the 'Friends of St. Augustine' for the past 15 years and in that time it has been my delight to call your attention to the words and example of our Holy Father who acts as our guide and encourager as we journey along life's path together. The word that comes to me is that he "rejuvenates" our faith by sharing his own zeal and enthusiasm for the Person he simply calls "The Christ".

Augustine had no doubt that Christ had invited him into an ongoing relationship from the first moment he "put on the Lord Jesus" even continuing through the many calls to a deeper conversion that came his way throughout the rest of his life. In all his writings and sermons he challenges everyone he encounters to enter into that same friendship with Jesus that he had achieved, and to recognize the Risen Christ in deep and personal ways - not as a ghost or apparition but as a living entity whom he called the "Totus Christus" (the Whole Christ) - permeating the web and woof of our lives in every age.

No one before him, and very few after him have been able to match the comprehensive way Augustine viewed all of human life through the lens of his surrender to the Lord Jesus which took place in the garden that day. The intellectual focus he brought to everything enabled him to weave cosmology, psychology, politics, history, art, culture and Religion into his understanding of how central Christ IS to the whole of our world's existence. At the same time he never allows us to lose sight of the profound Trinitarian dimension to this vast unfolding of all created reality. Jesus the Christ reveals the Trinity, and the Trinity is once and for all manifested in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Augustine was deeply interested in what binds us together. There is a relatedness to one another that is given us by God, that *contains* God. He sees our yearning for community as really a reflection that God is communal, i.e. The Trinity in whose image we are made.

Our Augustinian identity may be summed up as "The search for God from within a community where we can share our faith and life confidently, and out of which we can offer wholehearted service to the world, society and the Church in ways we could never achieve alone".

May the bonds of friendship that unite this Lay Association to St. Augustine continue also to rejuvenate our faith and service lived out with one another,

With much love,



Inside this issue:

Chaplain's Letter

1

The Spirituality of Justice.
Paul Maloney, O.S.A.

2

Augustinian Spirituality.
Sean O'Loughland

3

Sermon 14, 2. Carthage
418
St. Augustine

4

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.

The Spirituality of Justice:
Aspects of Augustinian Spirituality
Supporting the Activities Designed for
The 2014 Volunteer's Program.

This year a cohort of ten young people gathered in Sydney for the three week course run by the Australian Province of the Augustinians to prepare them for Volunteer work in various Social Justice Agencies around Australia and abroad. Half the Course had to do with practical issues surrounding the methodology used by the Catholic Church in speaking out on behalf of the poor and downtrodden of the world. Many documents were studied and analysed and the principles found there were put into perspective by an 'immersion experience' spent in the Redfern area and far-Western suburbs of Sydney.

The second half of the Course provided an in-depth study of the Spirituality of Augustine contained in his writings and in his lived experience of 36 years as a Bishop of a busy coastal Diocese in North Africa. St. Augustine's faith journey *with others* was the grounding point for his joining of spirituality with the tasks of acting justly. For him, Spirituality without Justice was like a soul without a body, and Justice without Spirituality was like a body without a soul. As our students were told time and time again, our spirituality is what our faith and values looks like in the concrete. "We are what we repeatedly do".

In answer to the question "What is the Spirituality underlying Justice?" Augustine comes to the answer readily from his own experience. After a long search, well into his thirties, he finally realised that the first place where God is to be found was in his own heart. "I looked for you everywhere, and you were within me all the time". Once he realised that God was deeply at the centre of who he was, he had to admit that God was also at the centre of everyone else he ever met, and was to be revered there. In his Rule he writes "You are all to live together therefore with one mind and one heart, and honour God in each other whose temples you have become". It is this *honouring of God in one another* that becomes the basis for acting justly in the world since everyone has an equal dignity and are to be respected and treated as such.

Since we are all equal in the dignity that has been bestowed upon us by our very creation, we must share the goods of this earth because they are gifted to everyone and not to just a few. Augustine is what today might be called a "redistributionist" as he tells his people "We brought nothing into this world, yet a full table is spread before you. The earth and its fullness belong to God [not to the powerful, wealthy individuals or nations]. God bestows the world on the poor as well as the rich" (Sermon 29, 2-4) In another place he writes: "God does not demand much of you. He asks back what he gave you and from him you take what is enough for you. The superfluities of the rich are the necessities of the poor. When you possess superfluities, you possess what belongs to others". (Exposition on the Psalms 147.12)

Augustine practiced what he preached proclaiming that everyone should act within the limits of their possibilities and in accordance with the principle "Who has more, gives more". (Sermon 39, 6). "When the rich man gives his own wealth, he does not give of his own but of that which God gave him to administer; hence he only has the right to possess it so long as he administers it well". (Sermon 50.2)

For Augustine, the spirituality that impels us to act justly flows from the insight that when we feed the hungry, clothe the naked or comfort the lonely we are ministering not just to the poor person, but to the Christ dwelling within each one. "Christ is present in the poor; when you give to the poor, it is Christ's hand which accepts". (Sermon 86.3,3)

With Augustine's words as their motivation the young people who have completed the Course intend to put the Spirituality he describes into practice. **Paul Maloney, O.S.A.**

Augustinian Spirituality

Sean Loughland

Augustinian spirituality differs from other spiritualities or 'spirituality in general' in three distinct ways. Firstly, rather than being based on a set of previously ascertained principles or milestones, Augustinian spirituality is based on a journey, a lived experience of search and discovery. Secondly, the Augustinian model is based on community - rather than the strictly personal set of values and judgments often found amongst other spiritualities. And thirdly, Augustinian spirituality is not passive or meditative, but a call to action. Augustine preached that it is through this spiritual communion of living our faith through ministry that we come to find God.

The journey to deep spiritual understanding is lifelong and paradoxically both inherently simple and complicated "spiritual values have then to be assimilated into our hearts and minds in order for us to be able to live them" (Van Bavel, 1986). In this way Augustinian spirituality differs from those which espouse clear process and ritual as the source of understanding – Augustinian spirituality is a journey, a constant search for truth.

This journey is also a journey carried out from within community and its shared experiences. While we often think of spirituality as inherently personal, the Augustinian experience is one based on *communio* with those united with us as members in the body of Christ, the Church. This is not to ignore the other feature of Augustinian spirituality that we describe as "interiority" which is an 'inward turn' to discover what is going on within ourselves. It is through a combination of introspection and sharing the results of such introspection with others that we gain a deeper understanding of how it is we are to love God and our neighbours more earnestly. As Augustine writes in "The City of God";

"No one should spend so much time in contemplation that they ignore the needs of a neighbour, nor be so absorbed in action that they feel no need for contemplation of God. What should draw us to contemplation is not escape or laziness, but the opportunity to search for and discover truth, knowing that as we make progress in this search we share our discoveries with others." (XIX, 19).

In this way we come to realise that in Augustine's eyes, spirituality is not meant to be an isolated, personal journey but a shared experience, where sharing and mutuality in faith and love provides the foundation for deeper understanding. Augustine himself once wrote "to become ourselves we must relate to others because life without friends is an exile" (On Psalm 125, 13).

The final way in which Augustinian spirituality differs from spirituality in general is in its active rather than passive nature. While spirituality is often considered psychological, cerebral, pondering or meditative, Augustinian spirituality is a call to action. Augustine promoted Matthew 25 as the basis for social justice ministry (or more accurately, ministry and service), but made a point of acknowledging its focus on action;

"People will not be invited to receive the kingdom prepared for them because they 'have lived chaste lives...have not practiced deceit or oppressed the poor...have not trespassed on the rights of others or misled them by taking a false oath.' It is not this that Christ says but 'receive the kingdom because I was hungry and you gave me to eat.' How greatly this outweighs all the rest. For on every other matter the Lord is silent. He mentions this alone." (389)

This is what appeals to me about Augustinian spirituality most- it is not removed from reality, but is ingrained in it. For want of a better phrase, it's not afraid to get it's hands dirty: "*Each of you expects to receive Christ when you meet him in heaven. Take care of Christ now as he lies by the roadside; take care of Christ who hungers, freezes is destitute and a stranger.*" (Sermon 25, 8). One cannot deny the fundamental good in Augustine's overwhelming love for his fellow man "*we are moved to intervene out of love for human kind*". Indeed he sold the sacred vessels of his Hippo church to take care of the poor, and lived with the mantra that "*not giving to the needy what is superfluous for you is a sort of theft*" (Sermon 206, 2). This stands as evidence for the Augustinian model of action – to sit passively in the face of adversity is not encouraged but in fact is to be discouraged. His is a spirituality that evolves, grows and solidifies through action – demonstrating justice and love for our neighbours and consequently demonstrating love for God.

Thus Augustinian spirituality appeals to me for three reasons, each of which separate it from other spiritualities or spirituality in general: in its ongoing, lifelong journey mirroring Augustine's life; in it's foundation in community; and finally in it's call to action. We are never entirely sure of how to find God which is part of the divine mystery. But we grow closer to this mystery through devoted searching, demonstrating love for our fellow human beings, and action in showing charity, love, humility and justice in our world.

SERMON 14

2. So learn to be poor and abandon yourselves to God, O my fellow poor! A man's rich, he's proud. In these riches, which are commonly called riches, there is nothing to be so carefully avoided as the disease of pride. Anyone who has no money, doesn't have ample means, has no particular reason to put on airs, and so this someone who has no reason to put on airs is not praised for not putting on airs. Someone who does have a reason should be praised if he doesn't put on airs. So why should I praise a poor man for being humble, when he has no reason to put on airs? Who could endure a person both needy and proud? Praise the rich man for being humble, praise the rich man for being poor. The one who writes to Timothy wants them to be like that, when he says "*Order the rich of this world not to be haughty in mind*". (1 Tim.6:17)

I know what I am saying: give them these orders. The riches they have are whispering persuasively to them to be proud, the riches they have make it very hard for them to be humble. Give me Zacchaeus, a man of great wealth, head tax-collector, confessor of sins, short in stature, shorter still in self-esteem, climbing a tree to see as he passed the one who was going to hang for him on a tree; give me this man telling us *Half my goods I give to the poor*. But you are very rich, Zacchaeus, you're very rich indeed! There's the half you are going to give away; why are you keeping the other half? Because *if I have robbed anyone of anything, I am paying it back fourfold*. (Luke 19:2-8)

St. Augustine, 418. Given in the
New Market Basilica, Carthage.