

June 2014

Friends of St. Augustine - Prayer Resource Guide

From our Chaplain

June 20th, 2014

Dear Friends,

a week ago I returned from an extended visit to the United States where a new strand of memories was layered over the many that had been woven in me since the time I first landed there as a very young junior Professed Augustinian. As one of my contemporaries put it within minutes of us meeting again, "We have been friends for 55 years".

Such a span of time calls for celebration, which was the reason why I made the trip, but there was a 'cloud of unknowing' misting my vision as I tried to glimpse our younger selves in the elderly gentlemen coming to greet me. I coined the phrase 'the anonymity of old age' to describe the feeling of walking into a room and not being recognized until I opened my mouth and the Australian accent gave me away!

St. Augustine hardly ever spent a moment of his life without some friend or relative close by him. We should be proud of the fact that in spite of the tyranny of distance we have been true sons of our holy father and have taken his words to heart:

"So that a human being might not be alone a system of friendship was created. Friendship begins with one's spouse and children, and moves on from there to strangers. But considering that we all have the same father (Adam) and the same mother (Eve) who will be a stranger? Every human being is neighbor to every other human being." (Sermon 299D, 1)

There are no strangers, only friends, because in our relationship with God we have already met the part of other people that is centred in God - because God is *with* them as much as he is with us - and so we are never separated from one another no matter how many years or miles intervene. *"He truly loves a friend who loves God in the friend, either because God is truly present in the friend or in order that God may be so present. This is true love."* (Sermon 336.2.2)

I arrived in New York in time to travel down to Maryland so that I could attend the 100th birthday of a lady who truly fits St. Augustine's description of '*God truly present in the friend*'. Millie Floria spends much of her day now praying the rosary, and each bead has a particular family member or friend who is remembered by name. In that sense, she has been praying for me along with her four children and their spouses, at least eleven grandchildren, thirty-five great grandchildren and two great-great grandchildren for the last forty years. Before all the guests arrived for the birthday a small group gathered around the dining room table for a home-Mass which was full of laughter and tears as we gave thanks

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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.

for the gift of life given to this lovely lady a century ago - and we acknowledged the debt we owed her for the abundance of love she had poured into the lives of so many of her family, her friends and her descendents.

It was a delight to hear her conversation (in spite of deafness) and to marvel at her keen memory of books, authors and events which often left me scrabbling to name. Her physical mobility is not great but her mind is as sharp as ever. As a result she can truly take to heart this admonition from St. Augustine: *"Always be grateful that you exist. The more you have loved being alive, the more fully will you thirst for everlasting life."* (On Free Choice of the Will, 3.7) When I was leaving she gave me a big hug and said "I am SURE we will meet again" and I agreed, particularly since we have both loved being alive and sharing each other's company over so many years, so why not thirst for more?

The other major reason for my far-reaching journey was to attend a Retreat Experience for Augustinian Laity which was held in Cape Coral, Florida during a weekend in late May. It had many similarities to the National Conferences we have held here in Australia, except on a smaller scale. Apart from me and a few visitors from Philadelphia, the majority of the participants were members of the local gathering of Secular Augustinians which meet with the parish priest regularly throughout the year. Fr. John Deary, O.S.A. has been their Pastor for the last 22 years and he has formed them into a close-knit group which meets to study the scripture of the week and to listen to the words of Augustine contained in many of his famous writings and treatises. The fact that they unpack his meaning together rather than try to understand it by themselves makes the task that much easier.

The Retreat Leader was Fr. Gary McCloskey, O.S.A. who has visited Australia on a few occasions so I thought it only fair that I return the compliment. Although the series of talks took up the theme of 'Prayer in the understanding of Augustine', a wide range of topics was touched upon in the dialogue that was encouraged during each of the sessions.

"There is no better way of seeking truth than through the method of question and answer. But rare is the person who is not ashamed of being proved wrong. As a result, a good discussion is often spoiled by some hard-headed outburst with its frayed tempers, generally hidden but sometimes evident. We planned to proceed peaceably and agreeably in our search for truth. I would ask the questions and you would answer. If you find yourself in difficulties, do not be afraid to go back and try again". (Soliloquies, II,7,14)

At each of the sessions Gary gave out a sheet of quotes of Augustine (some of which are contained in this letter) which provided us with many gems of wisdom to absorb and make our own. We all need silence to find out what we have gained from grappling with the truths being presented to us, *"that is, we contemplate on the inner truth according to our capacity"*.

The pattern of the weekend combining meals, prayer, talks and Eucharist would have been familiar to most of us who have attended our own Conferences except it was at a lower key. Catering was done by the organisers themselves or from local deli's (including breakfast!) and the parish Centre provided a cool environment from the Florida sun. It occurs to me that if any of our local groups would like to organise a mini-retreat for their own parish community - with a topic that could be repeated from place to place - then I think the American version would be a good model to follow and I would be happy to help with the themes and presentation.

So, while one form of travel has drawn to a close may its memory provide us with a further layer of gratitude that 'we are alive' and have shared each other's company over so many years.

With much love,

Paul