

AUGUSTINIAN FRIENDS - PRAYER RESOURCE GUIDE

SHARING THE SPIRITUALITY OF AUGUSTINE

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Take and Read.

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Reflections on the
Sunday's Scripture.

Near the time of the last National Congress in 2004 Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict, celebrated Mass at Ostia near Rome to honour the anniversary of Augustine's birth. He told the gathering,

"The emptiness of ideologies prompted Augustine to seek the Truth of Christ. Words like eternal love and wisdom are not fashionable today.

Augustine who lived in an age very similar to our own, went so far as to describe wisdom as a 'foreign word.'"

The then Cardinal continued,

"Experiencing the great emptiness of the ideologies of his time, Augustine felt a great thirst for that Truth that opens the way to Life. He understood that no one is able to reach God by his own efforts and he discovered in the end that Christ is true Wisdom."

In the fourth century a book by Cicero wakened Augustine to seek for Wisdom:

'I should not chase after this or that philosophical sect, but should love Wisdom, of whatever kind it should be; that I should search for it, follow hard upon it, hold on to it and embrace it with all my strength.

That was what stirred me in that discourse, set me alight, and left me blazing.' Conf, x,17

How did Augustine go about his search?

We know that he asked himself many questions such as:

What do I want? What do I desire? What do I burn for?

Why am I sitting here? Why do I live?

He was a boy from a Christian household, he had grown to love the Easter vigils, and being from the provinces he would go to church to find a girl friend.

The Christianity of the fourth century would have been presented to such a boy as a form of 'True Wisdom'. The Christ of the popular imagination was not a suffering saviour. There are no crucifixes in the fourth century.

Christ was rather *'the Great Word of God, the Wisdom of God.'* Sermon 279,7

Augustine, therefore, turned quite naturally, to the Bible, to find his 'Wisdom'. But, it took a long time before he fully appreciated its subtle presence within the Bible's pages.

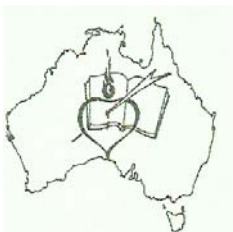
The years leading up to his sojourn in Milan had seen him seeking wisdom in all kinds of places.

Milan however provided him with the setting for his 'conversion'.

It began with a bout of tears that sent him to a remote corner of the garden of his house in Milan. His dear friend and heart-brother Alypius, present at a discreet distance, was a witness to the event. His cries and laments directed to God were interrupted by a strange and unaccustomed voice wafting from a nearby house: 'Pick it up! Read! Pick it up! Read! - Tolle! Lege! Tolle! Lege! It sounded like a game-chant of children at play but Augustine could not remember hearing such a rhyme. He hurried back to the place where he had left Alypius along with a copy of the Scriptures containing a book of St. Paul's letters. He committed himself to take to heart the first passage he lights upon.

In Paul's letter to the Romans 13:13-14 Augustine finds what he has been seeking.

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ."



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 for coming Sundays and quotes from Augustine. Formation material is offered by different members. It also contains a letter from our Chaplain oriented towards prayer and Augustinian Feasts and themes.

While his 'putting on the Lord Jesus Christ' was certainly a final decision on his way towards baptism, it also meant letting Jesus Christ become **the driving love, the stable centre, the total preoccupation of his life.**

'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ' can indeed be looked upon as the absolute statement of the nature of Augustine's spiritual journey. It is therefore the key to understanding Augustine himself.

To know Augustine is above all to recognise that Jesus Christ is at the foundation and core of all he did and wrote.

Among the many titles for Christ used by Augustine that of 'the whole Christ' is uniquely developed by Augustine to give his spiritual vision its ultimate horizon. *Christus totus* seeks to express the utter comprehensiveness of Christ, extending from the union of Christ with his Church– the Body of Christ– to a profound sense of inclusivity and responsibility that never allows one to separate love of God from love of neighbour, to a culmination in a Christ-centred articulation of humanity's destiny: the one Christ loving himself.

'...it is by loving that one becomes a member of Christ, becomes through love incorporated into the body of Christ; and there will be the one Christ loving himself..... When therefore you love a member of Christ, you're loving Christ, you're loving the Son of God; when you love the Son of God you love the Father. Love can never be separated. Choose for yourself what you love and the rest will follow.

Ep.Io.tr.10.3

For Augustine, progress in wisdom,

measured now by the yardstick of his understanding of the Holy Scriptures,
could only depend upon progress in self awareness.

Christian iconography often portrays Augustine holding a heart, a flaming heart; in effect the heart has become the trademark of Augustinian spirituality. Perhaps the best-known affirmation of the restlessness of the human heart opens his *Confessions*: the journey of Augustine is indeed a heart journey. And there is no question that the symbol of the heart holds a central place in his efforts to articulate self.

Augustine means to emphasise that all that the heart represents and evokes. Heart symbolises for Augustine that the God-inspired journey is a graced and ongoing journey that takes us inward, to the interior self, our true self, our God-self, away from what he calls, in classic *Pauline* fashion, the exterior self, our penchant for living 'externally', outside ourselves, committed to a false self, exiled from our truth, clinging to what is transitory.

Pope Benedict in his remarks at Ostia, recognised in Augustine's seeking, a way of living, of being, and of making the journey which could be useful for each of us in today's world.

As Augustine said: ***Return to your heart and see there what you may be thinking about God.
For there is the image of God.
In the interiority of your humanity Christ dwells,
there within you are being renewed according to God's image.
Recognize the author in the author's image.***

Io.eu.tr.18.10

From words ancient to words new: *Holy Wisdom, kindly Spirit,*

What a blessing you are.

Thank you for constantly guiding me.

For moving through my life

In such a loving and gracious way.

Joyce Rupp 2001

Sources: *Our Restless Heart*. Thomas F. Martin O.S.A; *Augustine of Hippo*, Peter Brown; *Inviting God In*, Joyce Rupp

*As Co-Leaders over the past three years we have felt it our privilege to speak to you about prayer.
We will continue to seek God's blessing on you and yours, Mary and Monica.*

March 14th. 2007

Dear Friends,

in Sydney over the next few weeks a series of lectures will be held to celebrate 150 years since the founding of the Good Samaritan Sisters by Bede Polding OSB. As Archbishop of Sydney Polding envisaged the colony of New South Wales as a garden where Benedictine spirituality could flourish. The title of the coming three evenings is "A Benedictine Conversation: ancient wisdom for a modern world". This title struck me as very similar to our own theme for next month's Friend's National Congress: "Augustine: Ancient and New Vision for the future". The fact that the first Bishop of Melbourne was an Augustinian places both traditions parallel to one another — both drawing on the original genius of their founders to make some sense of our present complex reality and of an even more confusing future.

St. Benedict is credited with saving Western Civilization from the Dark Ages. Thanks to the Monastic Rule he set down, generations of cloistered monks continually maintained libraries, hospitals and methods of agriculture that preserved much of value that would otherwise have been lost. Augustine's slightly earlier spirituality with Christ at its centre is particularly broad and sweeping in its concerns: ever dynamic in its searching, yet securely anchored in God as Truth Augustine learned to love a "Beauty, ever ancient and ever new" and generously shared the fruits of that wisdom with the succeeding centuries. From his Christ-centered stand point he marveled at the bounty of creation from which he tells us '*you are to take what you need; the remainder is needed by others.*' Augustine never ceased to be astonished at the depth and complexity of the human heart; he anguished over the mystery of evil human pride and selfishness; and he was often dismayed at the human capacity for self-deception (including his own). These perspectives were the driving force of his preaching, exhortations and his letters, all of which still strike present-day readers as disturbingly personal and incredibly modern.

As Augustine aged he increasingly thought of his world, its politics, its culture and its institutions as 'a tottering old man whose days are numbered'. He had admitted "I am an enigma to myself". But with wisdom gained from his intimacy with *Christ* he was able to write: "Don't refuse to regain your youth in Christ, who says to you 'The world is passing away; the world is losing its grip; the world is short of breath. Don't fear, your youth shall be renewed as an eagle's". Augustine continued on this theme:

"It is necessary that we be always new, without permitting the influence of the old to subvert us - growing, progressing, renewing our interior being day by day; we should not progress by growing old, rather we should let newness grow within us". (On Ps. 131)

Augustine's first step towards achieving this 'new life' took place on the night of Holy Saturday April 24th., 387 when, surrounded by his family and friends, he received the sacrament of Baptism at the hands of St. Ambrose, . Sixteen hundred and twenty years later, almost to the day, another group of family and friends will gather in Melbourne to honour this great saint and celebrate the anniversary of his baptism. By an amazing coincidence, on the concluding day of our Congress (Sunday April 22nd.), Benedict XVI will visit the shrine of St. Augustine in Pavia. Here the Pope will reverence the casket containing the bodily remains of one of the greatest thinkers in the history of the Church yet who remained a humble and contrite follower of Jesus Christ. His words have a timeless wisdom which we only discover for ourselves after a journey that no one can either take for us or spare us, but on which we can certainly companion one another as friends,

With much love,

