

Augustinian Friends - Prayer Resource Guide

Summary of Lecture given by Fr. George Lawless OSA
 “St. Augustine and Pastoral Care”
 To Augustinian Friends in Australia, April 2008.
 (Notes prepared by Peter Jones OSA)

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For St Augustine the chief concerns in his pastoral ministry were God, Church and People. Augustine took to heart the words of Christ in John's Gospel – ‘Feed *my* (i.e. Christ's) sheep’ (John 21:15-17)(Sermon 295,5). This charge was Augustine's ‘anxiety and burden’. (Sermon 339,4) .‘Servant-hood’ was the criterion for his life as pastor (e.g. Sermon 340A,3 and City of God 19,19). Augustine once used the image of a scarecrow in the vineyard of the Lord to describe the ministry of bishop – the bishop was called to ward off what would threaten the people entrusted to his care. (Sermon 340A,6).

Augustine exercised his episcopate during a prolonged period of conflict within Christianity (various schisms and heresies). Augustine took a resolute stand in the face of schism and dissidence. He is renowned for defending authentic Christian doctrines in the face error or what were seen as the evils of his time. Many of his conclusions have implications in the formation of catholic thought today.

Contemporary tensions between bishops and theologians find a parallel in the letters between Augustine and Jerome. These letters which centred on their differing scriptural interpretations, build up to an intensifying of conflict though ‘in the end there is a sincere profession of mutual affection and admiration’! (O'Meara (1973) 65).

The ministry of bishop was both arduous and hazardous in the time of Augustine. There was a real risk of physical attack from opponents particularly when travelling. Parallels can be found in contemporary examples of violence upon religious leaders in some areas of the world today.

Augustine and liturgy: (refer to Letters 54 and 55 for criteria for liturgical renewal). He made sure that what was practiced was in harmony with 1.Sacred Scripture, 2. Church councils, 3.Custom – universal and local.

In the opinion of Fr. Lawless there are aspects of contemporary renewal that support optimism and echo Augustine's values:-

- *Importance of community life;
- *Increased interest in transcendence;
- *Increased interest in spirituality;
- *Concern on the part of leaders for the welfare of citizens.
- *Importance of mutual compassion (concern for other's spiritual welfare)

Augustine here uses the image of a herd of deer crossing the stream in a line with the head of each one finding support on the rump of the deer in front. When the leader becomes worn out he goes to the rear and his place is taken by the next in line so they reach the shore by ‘bearing each other's burdens’.

In a sermon (340) Augustine gives a litany of human needs and appropriate pastoral responses. The underlying theme is that “all people need to be loved”.

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.

ST AUGUSTINE AND CULTURE Summary Notes prepared by Fr George Lawless OSA

For one third of his life Augustine never set foot inside a Catholic-Christian school. His formal education, consequently, was never oriented towards Catholic Christianity. Ideas from Seneca the philosopher alongside Cicero's philosophical writings with their strong ethical bent are two influences that surface in his monastic Rule. Political buzzwords such as 'concord', 'order' and 'common good' punctuate his monastic vocabulary. His reflections on 'friendship' owe a heavy debt to Graeco-Roman thought. Recent scholarship laments the fact that Augustine's monastic Rule is an under-used source for the social history of the city in Late Roman Africa. Twenty-four ethical precepts of Pythagoras, (a Greek philosopher, dating from the 6th century before Christ) have been identified as Augustine's 'first Rule.' The bishop borrowed heavily from Graeco-Roman concepts of 'wisdom' and 'happiness.' but modified them appreciably.

His was the first monastery in the Latin West to stock a library, hinting no doubt at the high expectations he had for his 'brothers.' All fathers of the early church both east and west benefited immensely from the best education possible in the ancient world. They effectively altered the orientation of classical culture and education by endowing them with new purpose and directions in the service of Catholic Christianity. If we forget Augustine in this regard, we have lost one eye; if we ignore him, we have lost both eyes.

Christ and Culture: Summary Notes prepared by Fr. Peter Jones OSA

The History of the discussion on 'love' in the Western world can be anchored around 2 suppers:- the Last Supper and another supper that occurred four centuries before Christ in Athens, in the Agathon in which the participants first discuss 'what is love?' (referred to in Plato).

- * Greek has a wider vocabulary than Latin – there are various Greek words referring to 'love'.
- * Augustine interprets the Gospel in the context of three words – "God is Love" (1 Jn) and turns these around into "Love is God".
- * In Latin words for love include *amor*, *delectio* and *caritas*. Augustine sees no difference of meaning in these three words.
- * For Augustine, all authentic love has something of God in it.
- * Christ comes to transform love.
- * Fr. Lawless offered a passing critique of Benedict XVI's Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* - while it is a very good encyclical, Benedict, unlike Augustine, does not go far enough in exploring the positive potentiality of 'eros'.

AUGUSTINIAN FRIENDS PILGRIMAGE (OR "PEREGRINATIO"), TO TAKE PLACE DURING THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER INTO EARLY OCTOBER. 2009

Tentative Itinerary:

- * Fly to Milan and spend two days visiting the tomb of Augustine, the site of his baptism and the villa of Cassiciacum
- * Bus to Tuscany where we spend 4 or 5 days at the Augustinian Convent at San Gimignano visiting ancient hermitages, as well as nearby Sienna and Florence.
- * Bus to Rome for 4 days to walk through the ruins of Ostia, visit Monica's tomb and enjoy the wonders of the Eternal City
- * Fly to Carthage and Tunisia where Augustine spent his Youth and later life as Bishop.
- * Possible on-going journey to England to Clare Priory and other Augustinian sites

If you would like to send an expression of interest in joining this tour please contact:-

Paul Maloney, Ruth McGowan or Maureen Atkins by email or the phone numbers listed on this newsletter, We will have **firm** details to give you by December as well as **the cost** of the tour!



From our Chaplain

September 10th. 2008

Dear Friends,

the glow of delight that transformed our lives and our city during the week-long events of World Youth Day continues to permeate the hearts and minds of people of all ages two months after the event. Only last week I took part in the first of four gatherings of young people in the Diocese of Parramatta who want to continue the momentum that was generated by the discussions that took place at various teaching sessions in the days before the Pope's arrival. As one young man said to me "We have spent so much energy in preparing for WYD that we now want to put some attention on ourselves and how we have been changed by the whole experience".

The topic chosen for the first of these post-WYD meetings focused on the call of Jesus to "Come, Be My Witnesses", and in the next three months we will discern what is contained in aspects of this invitation. But on the first night each person was asked to name what it is they most wanted in life. This question can be presented to us at any stage of our careers and the bucket list can be endless! For some it was to travel, for others it was to complete their education or to gain employment. In saying this we were not far from St. Augustine's thoughts when he made this observation:

O God of the created order, the beautiful form of material things attracts our eyes, so we are drawn to gold, silver and the like.

We are powerfully influenced by the feel of things agreeable to the touch; and each of our other senses finds some quality that appeals to it individually in the variety of material objects.

There is the same appeal in worldly rank, and the possibility it offers of commanding and dominating other people; this too holds its attraction. . . . (Confessions II, 5, 10)

At the end of the night one young woman explained to me how she no longer wanted to fill up her life with 'things', but rather to 'fulfill' the promise she sensed deep within. For her the call was not so much to discover what a person needs in their life, but rather *who* they want to *be* or become in the time they are given. We each of us have a spark or flame of genius that has been given us to nurture, and our task is to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations. In the words of the playwright, George Bernard Shaw, "I want to be thoroughly used up when I die." This can be done by sharing our gifts and talents, our time and our energy in the service of others. The words of Pope Benedict and the experience of being together in such a large gathering gave many young pilgrims - and the not so young observers - the insight that it is not achievements that matter but the relationships that we form when we make room for other people, particularly if they are needy, that gives us our identity as followers of Jesus

The call that Jesus makes for us to "Come, be my Witnesses" is not something that only the young are meant to hear during their one week in Sydney. We are all pilgrims on the road at every stage of our life's journey (for which Augustine coined the word '*peregrinatio*'), and this requires that we continually examine what it is we are meant to do and who we are meant to be at any given juncture. From his own experience Augustine could tell us that the journey was always unpredictable and arduous, but this only serves to increase our longing for a safe homecoming: 'there is only one sweet homeland, one true homeland, everything else for us is pilgrimage' (en. Ps. 61.7). With confidence he is able to pray:

O Lord our God, grant us to trust in your overshadowing wings: protect us beneath them and bear us up.

You will carry us as little children, and even to our grey-haired age you will carry us still.

When you are our strong security, that is strength indeed,

but when our security is within ourselves, that is but weakness.

Let us turn back to you at last, Lord, that we be not overturned.

We need not fear to find no home again because we have fallen away from it;

While we are absent our home falls not to ruins, for our home is your eternity.

(Confessions IV, 16, 31)

Our invitation to follow Jesus is a graced overture from God who accompanies and supports us at every step of the journey by means of the help and support we give one another,

With much love,

Paul

Tolle Lege (Take and Read)

BENEDICT XVI

Vigil Gathering at Southern Cross Venue

Saturday evening July 19th. 2008

Dear Young People,

Once again this evening we have heard Christ's great promise - "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you", and we have heard his summons - "be my witnesses throughout the world". (Acts 1:8) . . . The Holy Spirit has been in some ways the neglected person of the Blessed Trinity. A clear understanding of the Spirit almost seems beyond our reach. So, as a young priest teaching theology, I decided to study the outstanding witnesses to 'the Spirit' in the Church's history. It was on this journey that I found myself reading, among others, the great St. Augustine.

Augustine's understanding of the Holy Spirit evolved gradually; it was a struggle. Yet his experience of the love of God present in the Church led him to investigate its source in the life of the triune God. This led him to three particular insights about the Holy Spirit as the bond of unity within the Blessed Trinity: unity as '*communion*', unity as '*abiding love*', and unity as '*giving and gift*'. These three insights are not just theoretical. They help explain how the Spirit works. In a world where both individuals and communities often suffer from an absence of unity or cohesion, these insights help us remain attuned to the Spirit in our efforts to extend and clarify the scope of our witness.

So, with Augustine's help, let us illustrate something of the Holy Spirit's work. He noted that the two words "Holy" and "Spirit" refer to what is divine about God; in other words what is *shared* by the Father and the Son - their *communion*. So, if the distinguishing characteristic of the Holy Spirit is to be what is shared by the Father and the Son, Augustine concluded that the Spirit's particular quality is *unity*. It is a unity of lived communion: a unity of persons in a relationship of constant giving, the Father and the Son giving themselves to each other. We begin to glimpse, I think, how illuminating is this understanding of the Holy Spirit as unity, as *communion*.

Augustine's second insight - the Holy Spirit is abiding love - comes from his study of the first Letter of St. John. John tells us that "God is love" (1 Jn 4: 16). Augustine suggests that while these words refer to the Trinity as a whole, they express a particular characteristic of the Holy Spirit. Reflecting on the lasting nature of Love - "whoever abides in love remains in God and God in them"- he wondered: is it love or the holy Spirit which grants the abiding? This is the conclusion he reaches: "The Holy Spirit makes us remain in God and God in us; yet it is love that brings this about. The Spirit therefore is God as love!" (De Trinitate, 15.17.31) It is a beautiful explanation: God shares himself as love in the Holy Spirit. . . . Love which dispels uncertainty; love which overcomes the fear of betrayal; love which carries eternity within; the true love which draws us into a unity that abides!

The third insight - the Holy Spirit as gift - Augustine derived from meditating on a Gospel passage we all know and love: Christ's conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. Here Jesus reveals himself as the giver of 'living water' which later is explained as the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is 'God's gift' - the internal spring who truly satisfies our deepest thirst and leads us to the Father. (Jn. 4: 10 - 14) From this observation Augustine concludes that God sharing himself with us as gift is the Holy Spirit (cf. De Trinitate 15.18.32). Friends, again we catch a glimpse of the Trinity at work: the Holy Spirit is God eternally giving himself; like a never-ending spring he pours forth nothing less than himself. In view of this ceaseless gift, we come to see the limitations of all that perishes, the folly of the consumerist mindset. We begin to understand why the quest for novelty leaves us unsatisfied and wanting. With the Samaritan woman let us exclaim: "give me this water that I may thirst no more!" (John 4:15)

Dear young people, we have seen that it is the Holy Spirit who brings about the wonderful communion of believers in Jesus Christ. True to his nature as giver and gift alike, he is even now working through you. Inspired by the insights of St. Augustine: let *unifying* love be your measure; *abiding* love your challenge; *self-giving* love your mission!