

Friends of St. Augustine

Prayer Resource Guide

From our Chaplain

July 22nd. 2020

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Chaplain's Letter

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Dear Friends,

The plight we are in at the moment at the height of the pandemic seems too overwhelming and frightening to contemplate. My image of this crisis is as though the sky was no longer blue but had turned orange and we are living under a completely alien ozone layer which has made the foundations of our daily existence alarmingly insecure. The question that has been surfacing in my heart and mind has been “What comfort can St. Augustine offer us about living through a pandemic?”

In the last years of St. Augustine's life, in the early fifth century, he watched as Germanic Vandals marched across northern Africa, pillaging and occupying cities along the way until finally besieging his own city of Hippo. Today, as we watch Covid-19 make its way across the globe, ravaging nations and instilling fear, we can learn much from his insights. Though Augustine might seem an unlikely source of hope (given his reputation for pessimism), his spirituality can offer inspiration and guidance at this time.

In this Covid moment our illusions of security have been shattered. We are even forced to ask ourselves as believers: How have I conceived of security in my life? Dreams have been shattered in these months, relationships damaged, careers and businesses destroyed. There is no more important work for us as members of the Church in the coming months than consoling those who have been broken and bringing to our world the understanding that God provides the only enduring foundation for the journey of life on this earth. As people of faith, all of us must become comfortable with leaving security on the shore rather than seeking to create it through the prism of the cultural norms that so unreflectively we use to prop up our lives

Once this is done there is a reason for hope. If we choose God above everything else, we can live through anything. Even our suffering becomes an opportunity to glorify God, and share in Christ's suffering. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the most famous political prisoner of the twentieth century was able to write “Bless you, prison,” . He blessed prison because the clarity of persecution showed him what truth is, what humanity is, and brought him to God. The things we

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.

hunger for today—truth, meaning, purpose, identity and community—they are all found in Christ, and in our authentic Christian community. As ‘Friends of Augustine’ we must draw strength from our ongoing formation in what he conceived as essential, the building of community in the face of its current fragmentation.

The pandemic has also transformed the landscape of our *ecclesial* life in ways that will permanently change the nature of pastoral action and evangelization. Patterns of parish life that have sustained community and the proclamation of the Gospel for decades have been ruptured by the isolation of these months and the atomization of all social life that we have experienced. There is a great danger that this pandemic is creating a culture of increased disengagement within the life of the Church that will persist long after a vaccination is found.

Subtly, and most profoundly, the pandemic has destroyed our individual and collective feelings of security on every level – personal health, financial security, safety, and relationships. We have come face to face with the existential reality that we are not in control and that the security we had treasured and presumed is an illusion. Because of these three ruptures – the disruption of ecclesial life, the overpowering recognition that we do not live in a society of unassailable solidarity, and the devastating assault that the pandemic has visited upon our false sense and assumptions of security – indicate that the pastoral mission of the Church in the coming months and years must not just be one of recovery, but of transformation.

The slowness of life for many of us now provides the opportunity to reflect on these issues. Indeed, Augustine’s spirituality is centred on the interplay of contemplation and action. Augustine maintains that when we love God, we will spend time in contemplation, and the delight we find in this contemplation will compel us to undertake “righteous engagement in affairs.” He writes, “No one ought to be so leisured as to take no thought in that leisure for the interest of [one’s] neighbour, nor so active as to feel no need for the contemplation of God.” During this pandemic, we should embrace the slowness of life and refill our spiritual reservoir—but doing so should compel us into the heart of the world to act for justice. We should take this time before the reopening of our society to improve our physical and spiritual health, nurture the seed of love, and begin to develop ways to advocate for change. Augustine’s recollection of a period of grief in his own life is encouraging: *“Time never stands still, nor does it idly pass without effect upon our feelings or fail to work its wonders on the mind. It came and went, day after day, and as it passed it filled me with fresh hope and new thoughts to remember. Little by little it pieced me together again”* (Confessions 8: 13).

During this pandemic, the opportunities to serve are many, and it is incumbent upon us to pursue them. From donating to organizations on the front lines of this crisis to reaching out to neighbours in need of groceries or emotional support, we should be finding ways to serve—focusing particularly on those who are especially vulnerable due to age, race, class or legal status. We all have something to share; but of those more privileged, more is required. This pandemic could be the start of something beautiful if we resolve—through grace—to make the orange sky blue again,

With much love,

