

“Walking Together.....”

A Prayer Resource

From our Chaplain Fr. Dave Austin OSA

Winter 2023



Dear Friends

St Augustine had a remarkable turn of phrase which often revealed much about his inner self. A quote that comes to mind is his reflection on becoming a bishop in Sermon 340 – *‘For you I am a bishop, with you, after all, I am a Christian.’* While I cannot oblige you with the former... thankfully, my joy is in the latter... that we are together as Christians. For you, I accept the role of Chaplain of Friends but resonate with Augustine’s reactions to his role: *‘Where I’m overwhelmed by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you.’*

For over 20 years, Friends has benefitted from the rich insights and guidance of Fr Paul who has walked with you as you drank together *‘from the fountain of inspiration that is our holy Father Augustine... and found delight in sharing the insights on Augustine offered’* – to quote his 5 May letter. Again, we thank him for his prayerful example and generous sharing of wisdom.

I look forward very much to working closely with Mary McCormick and Judith Duncan, our new National Leaders, both of whom bring many years of experience to the leadership of Friends. Since Friends was founded in 1998, we have been well served by our National and Local Leaders. Some have served on the International Commission too and we are fortunate to have outgoing National Leader Jacky Worthington continuing in that wider forum.

In this initial communication, I thought it opportune to highlight the theme of our recent National Congress – **‘Walking Together!’** - a familiar concept in Augustine’s writings which has inspired the themes of several lay congresses on national and international levels.

Walking Together! is especially appropriate as our Church prepares for the World Synod in Rome in October this year – a unique gathering where people from many walks of life will participate in the synodal process. The Synod is a challenge and a timely reminder that we need to sharpen our awareness of, and commitment to, a Church *‘with doors wide open’* – to quote Pope Francis. Becoming a *‘museum Church’* is never an option!

Participation in Friends is a great gift to all of us and an important means of both personal, spiritual growth and gaining a renewed sense of being Church. The synodal process involves *‘deep listening’* to one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a process we can cultivate in our personal and family lives as well. Hopefully, Friends will help us to find a fresh vision of Church as we too listen and grow in our faith. Of course, the Lord is the great listener who knows us better than we know ourselves.

A great strength of Augustine is his ability to share the intimacy of his own spiritual journey and to express succinctly Jesus’ teaching with a sensitivity that nourishes our spirit. Many appreciate a similar gift of frankness in Pope Francis’ comments, often off the cuff. Recently Francis reminded us that we must not be *‘trapped in our own bubble’* but ready to take the risk and give something in return for the gifts we have all received.

It's no secret that the Pope is a soccer fan, an avid follower of the San Lorenzo Club in Buenos Aires. Perhaps the excitement of the recent Women's Soccer World Cup prompted his encouragement of priests *'to play soccer rather than preach dogma'* – a tongue in cheek aside, I suspect, but certainly a provocative invitation to bring the rich beauty of the Gospel to life in the concrete messiness of everyday life and to ensure that no one is left behind.

As Friends of St Augustine, we are very blessed in the gifts we have. Augustine's wisdom came out of the messiness of his life, shared so honestly in his Confessions. His later recognition that God wastes nothing in our story opens up for us the richness of his story and ours too – not easy when we are challenged in our spiritual journey by the deluge of surface information that comes our way, especially through social media.

In the weeks ahead, I encourage you to revisit what I call *'our spiritual memory'* – our loves, joys, losses and challenges - and rediscover the seed planted long ago that may need to be reawakened in our lives and hearts – perhaps with the help of these questions:

Who are the formative persons in your spiritual journey?

Who are the people of influence in your life today... who accompanies you?

Augustine invites us to *'return to our hearts.'* I hope you will find *'food for your spirit'* in the reflections from two Augustinian writers – both now with the Lord - that I share below.

Grace and peace to you all!

Dave.

‘The journey inward which Augustine invites us to make is a kind of homecoming. For Augustine, the heart is not the place of emotions but the place of richest, deepest thought and peace. It is the centre of our being, where we are totally ourselves, our deepest selves. In allowing ourselves to wander outside, we lose touch with ourselves.

“Why do you want to drift so far away from yourself?” he asks. “Turn back from your idle wandering. Return to your Lord. He is waiting. You have become a stranger to yourself. You do not recognize yourself. And you seek for Him who created you!”

‘If we are a long way from ourselves, he is saying, how can we come near to God? To return is to find our true home, to find our paradise on earth... We find God who has made his home within us.

‘When we return to our hearts we find rest and peace within in that place of solitude where Christ awaits us to welcome us home.’

From **Finding Your Hidden Treasure** by Fr Benignus O'Rourke OSA, p 45

‘Augustine was not simply a thinker and scholar, not simply a theologian or philosopher; he loved God, he relished friendship, he was amazed at the mysterious possibility of a divine-human covenant, he marveled at the wonders of creation, he never ceased to be astonished by the depth and complexity of the human heart, he anguished over the mystery of evil and human pride and selfishness, he was dismayed at human capacity for self-deception and lust for power... the driving force of his preaching, writing and exhortation, done in a way that can still strike present-day readers as incredibly modern and disturbingly threatening... (this) will keep Augustinian spirituality vibrant, remarkably relevant, and sometimes even controversial.’

From **Our Restless Heart** by Fr Tom Martin OSA, p 159