

Walking Together, *Open to the Voice!*

A Prayer Resource

Winter 2024

From our Chaplain Fr. Dave Austin OSA



Dear Friends,

Mention of the 'The Voice' may awaken a variety of emotions within many of us – sadness, frustration, relief, etc. On the Referendum weekend last October, I was participating with over 200 others in the Synod of the Diocese of Parramatta, discerning a way forward for the Church in Western Sydney. The Church's response to indigenous people was certainly on the agenda though not the only burning issue. The initial Synod, indigenous proposal failed – possibly because it was too busy and prescriptive. A revised proposal passed narrowly, perhaps reflecting the disquiet in our wider community at the time.

Looking at our faith development more broadly we need a host of different 'voices' to stimulate our reflection on the journey – true of the disciples in the upper room and on the Emmaus road, St Paul's hearers, and the Early Christian Community too. We are encouraged to share our faith though many of us are very private in this regard. Sometimes we open ourselves to others and risk vulnerability.

Some years ago, I was flying to Melbourne after some exhausting Province Meetings. Usually, I don't tell fellow passengers that I'm a priest lest it open up a detailed, semi-public conversation about the Church today that may not have a positive outcome. On this particular flight I shared a row with a young man who was obviously Catholic. He was keen to talk about how he and his wife had married in the Church but for a range of reasons couldn't get to Mass on Sunday very often. It was a wearing conversation and, in my fatigue, I looked at him and responded 'in Australian': *'Sounds like a lot of rubbish to me!'* He stopped in his tracks, stunned, and after a short pause replied, *'You're right!'* I hope his faith grew stronger!

Growth in faith comes from unexpected encounters, some of them not explicitly religious, some from people we don't even know. I recall the striking words of champion athlete Lauren Parker, seriously injured in a cycle accident in April 2017. Squarely facing her life-changing disabilities and now a top paralympic athlete, Lauren says, *'I can only go forward with the body I have!'* – a good fit for the journey of faith, *'I can only go forward with the faith that I have!'* – perhaps the *love* and the *joy* we have too!

While God was always a presence in St Augustine's life, his accumulated experiences and interactions set the scene for his final conversion. Few of his friends and colleagues, it seems, were people of faith. Indeed, moving in academic circles as he did, he encountered diverse viewpoints among the movements of his time, not to mention dealing with the tragic loss of a close friend, his loving relationship with his unnamed partner, the birth of their son Adeodatus and his untimely death in his late teens – life events, conversations and voices that disturb, even alternative voices of faith, awaken and form us in our faith.

His fascination with the preaching of Bishop Ambrose in Milan ultimately bore fruit but Augustine admits that what attracted him was Ambrose's kindness to him and the quality of his preaching: *'I hung keenly upon his words, but cared little for their content, and indeed despised it,*

as I stood there delighting in the sweetness of his discourse.’ (Confessions V.13) Augustine would later admit that Ambrose influenced his journey to faith: ‘Unknowingly I was led by you to him, so that through him I might be led, knowingly to you.’ (Ibid.)

Another ‘voice’ in Augustine’s life was that of Monica, faithful mother and constant pray-er for her son’s conversion, who sought advice from Ambrose. Monica was inspired by the prayer of the mother whose son was restored to life by Jesus: ‘Young man, arise, I tell you.’ (Luke 7:14) By now, Augustine was no longer a Manichee, much to his mother’s joy, and, in response to the sensible ‘voice’ of Ambrose, was becoming more open to the Catholic faith – ‘Against this background, however,’ he says, ‘I now began to prefer Catholic doctrine.’ (Confessions VI.5)

Augustine continually searched his heart and shed what he calls ‘a heavy rain of tears’ in the garden in Milan. While many other voices influenced him along the way, it was eventually the ‘voice’ of a child in the neighbouring garden – ‘Pick it up! Read! Pick it up! Read!’ - that prompted him to open the Scriptures – his moment of conversion!

In the weeks ahead, I encourage you to revisit ‘your spiritual memory’ – and recall the ‘voices’ in your own journey – perhaps with the help of these questions:

- Who are the formative persons or ‘voices’ in your spiritual journey?
- For whom have you been, or are you, a formative ‘voice’?

I hope you find ‘food for your spirit’ in the reflection from St Augustine that I share below. The remainder of this reflection on the Our Father will be printed in the next edition.

Grace and peace to you all!

Dave.

On the Lord’s Prayer – From Letter 130 to Proba – St Augustine

We need to use words so that we may remind ourselves to consider carefully what we are asking, not so that we may think we can instruct the Lord or prevail upon him.

Thus, when we say: ***Hallowed be your name***, we are reminding ourselves to desire that his name, which in fact is always holy, should also be considered holy among men. I mean that it should not be held in contempt. But this is a help for men, not for God.

And as for our saying: ***Your kingdom come***, it will surely come whether we will it or not. But we are stirring up our desires for the kingdom so that it can come to us and we can deserve to reign there. I mean that it should not be held in contempt. But this is a help for men, not for God.

When we say: ***Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven***, we are asking him to make us obedient so that his will may be done in us as it is done in heaven by his angels.

When we say: ***Give us this day our daily bread***, in saying this day we mean “in this world.” Here we ask for a sufficiency by specifying the most important part of it; that is, we use the word “bread” to stand for everything. Or else we are asking for the sacrament of the faithful, which is necessary in this world, not to gain temporal happiness but to gain the happiness that is everlasting.