

“The Heart’s True Treasure”

Homily for the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 7th 2016

We know him as St. Augustine. However if you had seen Augustine in his twenties and early thirties you would not have expected that he would one day be considered in league with St. Paul as one of the greatest theologians in 2000 years of Christian history. When he was a younger man he had everything the world celebrates. He had status in Roman Society, was an academic of high standing, was popular and had a way with the ladies. He lived at a time of decadence—politically, socially, morally and until his 33rd year he fit right in. Augustine was a man who had a love for life and he lived it exuberantly.

And yet while exteriorly he seemed to have all that we could ever want, on the inside he was increasingly restless and filled with a kind of dis-ease. Behind Augustine are a succession of desperate searches for fulfillment: excessive pleasures, false religions, philosophy, dissipation and distractions—futilities that left him so weary of himself he could only cry out, “How long, O Lord, how long?” At the very moment when he uttered that cry, circumstances led his eyes to a passage in Romans that showed him he could be freed from sin. Shortly afterward, he was baptized.

Now, a decade since his baptism at the age of 43 after long musing upon the transformation that took place in him when he finally believed, he begins a unique autobiographical and philosophical prayer to God, a book which will become one of the most original and famous works in all of literature, the world’s first psychological “autobiography.” The Confessions will be his testimony of God’s interaction with a soul that has found rest in his Creator.

Heart bursting with the reality of God, he addresses his manuscript directly to the Lord as one long prayer and meditation—a prayer and meditation that will take him five years to complete. He dips his quill and begins,

“Great are you, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is your power, and your wisdom is infinite.”

In contrast to God, he muses, what is man? Yet there is a connection between the two. Humans, such a small part of creation and short-lived as they are, still find a need to praise God. In spite of sin, each feels the longing to reach out to his Creator. Why is this? He realizes it is the doing of God.

“You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.”

That line summarizes the theme of Augustine’s life and will not be bettered in all the writings that lie ahead of him, in which he will wrestle with the deepest issues of theology. He came to realize the truth of Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel:

Where your treasure is your heart is also.

He discovered that the heart's true treasure is Jesus.

So how is it that we can learn more fully what Augustine discovered so that our restless hearts can discover Jesus as their heart's true treasure and so be at rest? Our readings for today offer three ways to find our rest in God.

1. Wisdom invites us to rest in grace.
2. Hebrews invites us to rest by knowing life's goal.
3. Luke invites us to rest by cultivating generosity,

Underpinning everything is Grace which in turn allows us to better attain life's goal while inspiring us to live with generosity in the present.

In the Wisdom reading we heard:

That night was made known beforehand to our ancestors, so that they might rejoice in sure knowledge of the oaths in which they trusted.

The night referred to here is the Passover. The day that for the Jewish People marked God's grace delivering them from the bondage of Egypt. God foretold the people that this day would come and so they rejoiced fully in the oaths they trusted. Not only did God foretell what would happen he also told them in detail the ritual sacrifice that was to mark that night and its commemoration for hundreds of years to follow.

Now the key to understanding this verse is the phrase:

"knowledge of the oaths".

The word for oath in Latin is "sacramentum" from which we get the word "sacrament". Just as our Jewish ancestors had knowledge of God's promises, and were called by God to set their hearts on him, this is even more so for us. The Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church are the primary means by which God extends his grace and favour to us, especially in the Holy Eucharist, the fulfillment of the Passover meal.

When we come to see and interact with the Sacraments as the Lord designed them then we are able to put our trust in Jesus and allow for him to be our heart's true treasure.

As we do so we are rooted in grace so that we can affirm life's true goal. Every sacrament joins us with God in Jesus Christ and so points us to heaven. That "better country" described in the reading from Hebrews. Because we know that this better country is our goal the writer to Hebrews begins today's reading with these confident words:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen¹

That which is unseen is heaven but with faith we hope that one day we will reach life's true goal.

Hebrews 11 has been called the Hall of Fame of Faith

because it chronicles the faith of many characters from Israel's past who braved all kinds of trials to inherit the promise that only comes to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In today's reading the example given is Abraham and Sarah for whom God did the impossible, bringing forth fruit in two who were well beyond child-bearing, and then of whom he asked the unthinkable in the offering of that son, Isaac, in sacrifice. Faith enables us to go forward in darkness, yes, but that is because God has thrown so much light behind us in the past heroes of faith, enabling us to hope in what we cannot yet see.

The Catechism says that hope is the theological virtue:

by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness."

That is, faith enables us to realize the eternal happiness we hope for, even though we may not yet see it. So faith has, as a constituent part of its makeup, that trust which enables us to strive for a promise without seeing it.

When grace grounded in the Sacraments points us always toward life's goal we then in the present are able to fully live as people whose lives are marked by generosity.

In the Gospel Jesus speaks specifically about alms giving and then tells a parable about slaves who are waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet. He commends them for their alertness. One of the primary ways we show that kind of attentiveness and alertness in the present is through the exercise of generosity. Jesus puts it so clearly

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Why is generosity expressed through alms giving a purse that will not wear out? Generosity is the outworking of the love of God and it is generosity that will characterize life in heaven. Those who are learning to be generous through alms giving are extending themselves to others in ways that order their lives so they conform to God's life.

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (Heb 11:1). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

We read in Proverbs:

“He who has compassion on the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his good deed.”

To be compassionate to the poor is a way to serve Jesus in the present while we await the master's return. Here at St. Peter's we can practically give alms by making a financial contribution to the work of St. Vincent de Paul. We can extend this same kind of compassion by bringing in can goods and by actively participating in the work of St. Vincent de Paul. You might also consider going to Tim Hortons and buy \$5.00 gift cards that you can then give to people who request a hand out, be it while sitting in your car at a stop light or when approached on the street when down town.

We have a treasure that awaits us in heaven says Jesus that calls us to make its' acquisition our greatest desire in this life.

When we discover what it means to rest in God then his grace will allow us to more clearly see our goal so that we can become ever more a generous people. For what matters for Jesus is not primarily we would have a love of life but that we would live a life of love.

St. Augustine so came to order his own soul so that a life of love allowed him to truly know how to experience a love of life. He found that rest only experienced by those for whom Jesus is their heart's true treasure.