

Augustinian Spirituality and the Life of the Laity

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Compiled from the works of Santiago Insunza OSA.

The term Spirituality be it Augustinian or Lay is understood to be the relationship between man and God and to speak of Christian Spirituality is to affirm the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Christians accept that the will of God was made manifest through the humanity of Jesus who revealed to us who the Father is, how he reacts as well as the way to discover Him and have everlasting fulfillment.

2. Augustinian Spirituality is a special Christian Spirituality that leads to the approach to our lord Jesus Christ. Although there are several approaches the Spirituality of St Augustine provides us with a platform so to speak from which we can begin to understand the Gospels. Despite the many pathways of groups to spirituality, not one can claim this Spirituality, as it belongs to the whole church.

3. For many years Augustinian Spirituality was identified with monasticism, but this did not deter many lay men and women as well as founders of male and female religious communities over the years from assuming this Spirituality which emphasized strongly between what corresponds to religious life and the world of the laity. It is well known and can be verified that lay spirituality is only now beginning to develop.

4. Vatican II, with fundamental option for ecclesiology based on Communion and the more recent document (Christifideles Laici), signifying and clarifying the identity and function of the Laity. Members of the church share a common baptism which nurtures our lives in Christ and a common mission to build up the reign of God. Our Baptism is a gift freely given as a mission to fulfil. (Fr. Congar a Dominican Theologian predicted this many years ago. If the Church freely open its doors to the activity of the Laity we will be witnesses to a significant rebirth even if not at desired pace (Congar, Ives Jalones para una Theologia del laicado 19963 p 17. id Estela Barcelona.)

5. Today the Communion between the laity and the religious, so desired by the Church is believed to be similar to a living object entering into a relationship with others, all offering their own contribution for understanding that in the Church Communion and all states of life are interrelated, each offering its own original and irreplaceable expression. This closeness and agreement in the Augustinian setting between the religious and laity is not without dangers and tensions. The fullness of the experience of being the people of God with the active participation of the laity demands a great deal of effort on the part of all involved.

6. Lay spirituality is not one that is in competition with others but rather it is an attempt to situate Christian Spirituality, "The mother of all spiritualities in the life and activity of the Laity. Therefore to speak of Augustinian Lay Spirituality is a way of talking about living according to the spirit of Jesus Christ together with St Augustine in the heart of the world.

7. We now draw closer to Augustinian Spirituality which recognises and understands human beings as mirrors and reflection of God, a mystery (Con. 4-22) an abyss swollen and unstable as the sea (Con 13.20-28.) vulnerable and needy upon believing and discovering that we bear the mark of sin. The confession of this indigence is transformed into search "You have made us for yourself Lord "and our hearts are

restless until the find rest in you ("Con 1:1"). Augustine views this search for God as communal and upon choosing this communal model he considers the Jerusalem community as the ideal of Christian Life,(Sermon 74:4). They had one mind one heart. (Acts (4:32-35). The vocation and the mission of those baptised is one and the same, but the lay condition has its own characteristic and its own non exclusive field for pastoral activity in the Church and in the world.

8 .In both areas many fields of apostolic activity are evident as the ecclesial communities, the family, youth groups and national and international organizations. Since women have a greater participation in our day and age in society in general, it is very important to encourage their increasing participation in the apostolic life of the church, as there is a great need for awareness of the common mission which we share in the church. This in itself is missionary and organised as laity, ordained ministers and religious. All vocations and spiritualities are challenged to emphasize what they have in common: Baptism shared by all that follow Christ.

9. The specific characteristics of Augustinian Spirituality can found in St Augustine himself in the paths that define his experience as a human and as a Christian. As a Christian, we are his companions, fellow disciples on the way,(Ser 134:1) He is a labourer in the vineyard working with us with the strength provided by the Lord,(Ser 49:2) His religious journey, the confessions of his doubts and bis most intimate personal experiences allow us to trace a Christian itinerary valid for our times

God and humanity are two topics which are entwined for him. Love does not join with selfishness and pride is not compatible with humility .Though incompatible at first glance they are united in the person of Jesus Christ as love reaching out and vulnerable (Phil 2: 7).St Paul stated God becomes one of us suffering our human miseries an concealing his divine greatness(Jhn.eva.IO:l)

One of Augustine's most significant insights was to come to understand God from the human perspective and to contemplate humanity from a divine perspective. Andthis path begins with us.

10. Seeing God from the human perspective.

Interiority and Communion are the chief categories of Augustinian thought. Our happiness and balance depend upon our relationship with our selves which are truly guiding principles of his spirituality. If we are unbalanced and scattered exteriorly will find it difficult to enter into our interior self, we can only achieve this by drawing away from the outward distractions of our senses can we return to our heart capable of knowing and being known. He who is without interiority is anonymous ,without mystery and without curiosity. This deep dimension of interiority is a privileged place for discovering God and human fulfilment "Go back to your heart and from there to God. Searching for, understanding and loving God is a vocation that feels in his inner cloister Oh lord my God that I may orderly seek your face give me strength to seek you, who has made me find you and has given me the hope of finding you more and more. By this path of interiority he finds God.

He expresses this in one of the most beautiful texts in his book' the Confession, late have I loved you, beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you. You were within me but I on the outside seeking there for you. Returning to our heart contemplating and paying attention to our own person is the Augustinian response to the culture of exteriority.

11. Interiority and communion are both very demanding. When we enter into the depth of our being we experience a desire for communion and experiencing a thirst for love and transcendence. It is not the end of the line but rather an open door and a bridge for communication. In this way love and communication are nourished by interiority.

Augustine indicates that humanity was created by God and this can be understood of the interior person where reason and intelligence reside. God created humanity and saw it was good.

PART 2

Life as a search. The grandeur and limits of our humanity.

All creation and humanity was greatly admired by Augustine and accepted that humanity was created in the image of God and can be understood as the interior person where intelligence and reason reside.

The human race is the most beautiful part of creation. God created humanity and saw that it was good and so, we have good will and open to immense possibilities and gifted with the seed of intelligence and wisdom sown in all our souls.(Ser.1 17:11) You have made us for yourself Lord. He does not ignore the mark of sin.

We all sometimes participate in the misery of the beggar, but faith, hope and charity rebuild in us the Trinitarian image of God, though imperfect but an image never the less which makes the search for God a constant element of our life.(Con:!! and 6:16:26) God is aware of the weakness of human existence which finds itself in a constant quandary with itself in the abyss, contradiction and mystery.

The human soul is where the serious questions originate, between two great rivals, my two wills one carnal and the other spiritual fighting each other 'This antagonism destroys my soul'(Con 8:10) This therefore is the mystery of freedom, the pretence of establishing oneself without God. Our will was created naturally good by God but also variable. God created humanity and saw it was good so we have intelligence and wisdom and open to immense possibilities. It can stray from good towards evil and from evil in order to do better with God's help. This bearing of weakness in our selves confers on life a sense of tragedy. The vocation to truth and happiness can only be acquired with fullness in the person of Jesus Christ a teacher a doctor and model. The only son of God by nature has become the son of man out of loving mercy for us in order that we children of man by nature might become in Him and by his grace children of God.

St Augustine builds his reflection on humanity from the bible, the source of all seeking for the master of all truths and love and rule for Christian life style (Ser 46:11:24)He directs attention to the book of Genesis which mentions that we have been created in the image and likeness of God. We are created from nothing and because of sin we are limited and shattered interiorly.

Jesus Christ the mediator between God and humanity presents himself as something new and as hope for life transformed. He is the fountain of life having assumed our mortal flesh He is the magnet of our desires.(Ser 142:9)In the depth of our humanity we discover God/Truth and in itself is worthy of admiration(Ser 126:3:4)Thus we can follow a way to ascension to God from your own interior and your creation. This way begins from the outside and lead within from interior to superior.

Augustine places emphasis on interiority and transcendence for if we dedicate ourselves to things we risk loving creation and not the creator (Ser 313::20) We go off centre when we alter the order of our love and does not respond to God's call.(Con 1:1;1 and 6:16:26)

Parallel to our human grandeur we find our condition of deep poverty. It is like the other side of the person who supports the misery of a beggar and discovers that within there is something which transcends the human being (Con 10: 8:15) This drawing closer to

what is profound and unknown changes our human life into one of restlessness and search.

Augustinian constant seeking and striving is beyond all doubt a thirst we share with other contemporaries. This constant search is preceded by a longing for happiness, truths and fulfilment which we experience. Once again St Augustine's confession rings out 'You made us for yourself God and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.' It is God who stirs that restlessness within us through our own doubts and darkness. LUIS ROSALES says it poetically. At night we shall go /at night /moonless we shall go/ moonless in order to find the fountain that alone enlightens us.

The spirit makes itself known on experiencing the depth of our own heart and the doubts that surround us and we become aware of a truth that is greater than all science. We seek in order to find and we find in order to continue seeking. When we think we have finished, we have only just begun.

Love in human life. St Augustine concludes that love gives meaning to life as we live according to what we love. To understand people it is important to know what they love for if love dies life is paralysed. The life of St Augustine is the history of someone in love. He speaks with emotion of his soul friend and confesses that without friends he could not be happy.(Con 6:16:26) Friendship is vital to him. He always appears to be surrounded by friends. To love and to love was his daily bread. Love for him has a religious quality. An honest life finds its origin in the love of things that should be loved as they should be loved, that is in the love God and neighbour.

Seeing humanity from the perspective of God is a call to conversion. Conversion a personal encounter appears to be united to the life of S Augustine This encounter between God who calls through different means and the human being who responds in freedom. Therefore conversion has an all embracing quality 'A total and complete desire (Con 8: 8:19)

Faith and conversion must be understood in the context of seeking in the interiority. Those who wish to probe the depth of his or her person must eventually discover the ultimate questions. God's life would become the triangle, which directs our train of thoughts with many variations towards evil, death and love. To make clear this proposal we must look at our own activities and transpose ourselves into a questioning mode as St Augustine said so vividly I became a riddle to myself and questioned my soul Con 4:4; 9.

Even though conversion falls within the bounds of grace and is not the product of any particular activity and cannot be considered a goal but rather a means and a healing principle while we forage through the unproductive field of our own life.

To convert is to believe and to be believed. Faith and conversion are occurrences taking place within us and involve the whole of our being. God does not want our words but our hearts. (Ps 134:11)

Prayer a dialogue with the interior teacher is a cry from the heart. The natural terrain of prayer is the interior characterised by a dialogue. It is a conversation with God, when we read God speaks to us but when we pray we speak with God. (Ps 85: 7), First come listening to God, gathering and finding ourselves, is a return to the centre where the realm of the interior teacher awaits. It is there that God guides us. Augustine presents his doctrine regarding Christ, the interior teacher." Return to your heart and if you are faithful you will find Christ there as He speaks to us. I call to him

but He teaches in silence. I speak with the uttering of words. He communicates within through fearful thoughts.(Ser 102:2) St Augustine tells us that one of simple but essential prayer which need to demonstrate our constant communication with God is give us what you command and command what you will (Con 10: 337: 60) This therefore is the basic opinion of God's beggar who acknowledges his own limitation ,but is aware of what he is capable of doing with the presence and aid of God's love. So if God is the centre of communication with the human heart, He is the only being we need to request. We search for His face in our lives and discover His presence in our every day situation with eyes that believe hope and love. The whole essence of Christian life is love. Love God and love one another as God loves and this is what we dedicate ourselves while we are in the world. TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

You can tell me that you do not see God but can you tell me that you do not see one another. When we talk about prayer we talk about interiority. Therefore prayer without interiority is not possible as is interiority without preparation or silence, which freezes us from the noise and humdrum of our own world.

Humans must live in tune to be alert so that not only our own voice but also our works can give praise. God listens to us. Prayer can then be defined as a dialogue that moves the heart the root of our own very life- to change.

Conversion of the heart towards God occurs in prayer. God is always ready to aid us as long as we are ready to receive the aid He offers. To use many words in prayers is characteristic of the gentiles than of Christians (St Augustine) they are more interested in exercising their tongues rather than uplifting their hearts. Prayer then is understood as a cry from the heart. None can doubt the clamour of voices raised to God by those who pray by raising the sound of their voices without elevating their hearts so to praise God do not become noisy with words and mute in works.(Ser 88:13:12)

St Augustine offers a human and reasonable interpretation of Christ's words, which may have important significance in the realm of the Laity due to inevitable obligation of a complex life overflowing with other activities.

Prayer then is a dialogue of the heart, which can be identified with desire and love. To pray always is to desire to love continuously. If you do not want to interrupt prayer do not cut off desire, which is a continuous voice of your soul. You would be silent if you stop love. Augustinian spirituality centres on the search for God and Love is the path leading the person to God while in conversion and prayer it is God who takes the initiative.