

Dialoguing with the Inner Teacher - Fr Gary McCloskey O.S.A. at Clare Priory 27/11/08

Fr Gary McCloskey, Professor of Augustinian Pedagogy at Merrimack College, USA, currently on a working Sabbatical, talked to Friends of Augustine at Clare Priory on the 27th November 08 during his 5 day visit to the Community.

Fr Gary's talk was based on the theme: "Dialoguing with the Inner Teacher".

The background was: The concept of the Inner Teacher was crucial to St Augustine - In De magistro Augustine presents his experience that no earthly teacher is a real expert. He even says, "What foolish oddity could ever lead someone to send a child to school so that he can learn what the teacher thinks?" (De magistro, 45).

Fr Gary has very kindly permitted us to publish the notes for his talk:

1. Background Notes –

Concept of Inner Teacher crucial to Augustine - In De magistro Augustine presents his experience that no earthly teacher is a real expert. He even says, "What foolish oddity could ever lead someone to send a child to school so that he can learn what the teacher thinks?" (De magistro, 45)

In Tractate on First Letter of John (III, 12) he notes, "Consider this great puzzle. The sounds of my words strike the ears but the Teacher is within. Do not think that any human teaches another. The sound of our voice can admonish, but the one Who teaches is on the inside. The sound we make is useless."

Learning through the Celebration of Eucharist: "You must not attribute it to your own powers, your own merits, your own efforts, this lifting up of your hearts to the Lord, because it is God's gift that you should have your hearts up above." (Sermon 227)

On Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ "If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive." (Sermon 227)

In the writings on Augustinian Interiority Spanish Augustinians have identified stages or steps in Augustine's practice of interiority

Keller1

1. Return to yourself (outer life to inner life)
2. Go beyond yourself (inner life to truths of reason)
3. Transcend truths (varied truths of reason to ultimate Truth)
4. Experience Enlightenment (return to outer life with a truer vision of self and reality)

Galende2

1. Do not be eager to expend all your energy on external things
2. Go within yourself

3. Transcend yourself

4. Now experience all things external from your interior life.

Keller also identifies three dispositions³

1. Desire for Authenticity (To be aware of who I am – where I am – where I am going and what goals I am orienting my life toward.) that Augustinian Interiority can help to cultivate:

2. Capacity for Discernment (Sound self-criticism, Critical judgement in the light of truth, Consistent commitments)

3. Sense of Transcendence (Preventing myself from being wrapped up in the sensate, in myself, in my own culture, in what is merely human).

Unlike Ignatius of Loyola, Augustine does not teach us through a method or specific spiritual exercises. Rather, his life and writings provide indications for a path for the journey/pilgrimage. This may follow Drucker observation that for Augustine “teaching is best understood through a metaphor of pointing,”⁴ Perhaps, Augustine is like Mary in the Hodegetria Icon pointing the way to the teachings of Christ.

2. Outer Dialogue

Community – Critical Difference vs. Ignatius (Man for Others) - Augustine’s Life - Major events always with others – Simultaneous Conversions - Problem of Portraits

Unity

“The main purpose for you having come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart.” (Rule I,2)

I don’t speak as a school master or teacher, but as a servant or minister. I don’t speak to pupils, but to fellow students; not to servants, but to fellow servants. There is but a single Teacher whose school is on earth and who teaches us from on high. (Sermon 292, 1, 1).

Love of God and Love of Neighbour

“Before all else, dear brothers, love God and then your neighbour, because these are the chief commandments given to us.” (Rule I)

“Since the love of God is not so frequently put to the test, people can deceive themselves about it. In love of neighbour, however, they can more easily be convinced that they do not possess the love of God, if they are unjust towards other people.” (Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians, 45)

van Bavel identifies this as the “double face of love,”⁵ with a “practical primacy of love of neighbour”⁶ But he calls it “practice in loving God.”⁷

3. Inner Dialogue

Go within - Silence

“Return to yourself. Truth resides inside a person. (De vera religione, 39,72)

“Let us leave something for people’s reflection, a generous margin for silence. Go within yourself; leave the noise and the confusion behind. Look inside yourself and see if you can find that hidden corner of the soul, where, free of noises and arguments, you don’t need to begin disputes or brood on pig-headed quarrels.” (Sermon 52, 19, 22)

Soliloquy (Soliloquies)

Listening- Discernment

“Be gentle in hearing the word, in order to understand. Listen to the voice of truth in reflection and in silence so that you are able to understand it.” (Sermon 52, 19, 22)

Seeking Authenticity

“Inside my heart I am whoever I am.” (Confessions, 10, 3, 4).

Truths of Reason

“Let me know myself. Let me know You.” (Soliloquies, II, 1,1)

4. Reconsiderations (Retractationes)

truths to Truth (Keller)

People are moved to marvel at the peaks of the mountains, the gigantic waves of the sea, crashing waterfalls, the vast stretches of the oceans and the dance of the stars, while they forget themselves. (Confessions, 10, 8, 15).

Transcendence

“Return to yourself. Truth resides inside a person. When you discover that you can change, transcend yourself.... Go where the light of reason is illuminated.” (De vera religione, 39,72)

Humility –

“A ladder of humility”(Sermo 96, 3)

“The first step in the search for truth is humility. The second, humility. The third, humility. And the last one, humility.”(Letter 118, 3, 22).

Confession (Confessiones)

Sharing the Truth

“I must tremble in the face of your judgments, Lord, because your truth is neither mine, nor his, nor hers. Rather, it belongs to everyone whom you call to share it in communion

with you. Likewise, you give us the terrible warning not to take truth as personal property, for fear we will find ourselves deprived of it." (Confessions XII, 25, 34)

"Truth is the inheritance of all, and thus is not the particular property of anyone. What is in common belongs to everyone so that all who come to it may use it and be enlightened. It is equally distant and equally close to everyone." (Expositions on the Psalms, 75, 17)

"The love of knowledge and truth should invite us to continue learning. The love of others should compel us to teach." (Answers to the Eight Questions of Dulcitius, 3).

Contemplation/action

"Not only must we be attentive in listening, but also vigilant in action." (Sermon 16A, 1)

"Take the three modes of life: the contemplative, the active, the contemplative-active. One can live the life of faith in any of these three and get to heaven. But, in any of these one must love truth and do what love commands. No one must be so committed to contemplation that he gives no thought to his neighbor's needs, nor so absorbed in action that he omits the contemplation of God." (City of God, XIX, 19)

Totus Christus⁸

Augustine refers time and again to Mt. 25:40 "Anything you did to the least of mine, you did it to me" and Acts 9:4 "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?" Augustine says: "He too is us. If it were not him, the sentence 'Anything you did to the least of mine, you did it to me' would not be true. If it were not him, the sentence 'Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?' would not be true. Consequently, we are him, for we are his members, we are his body, for he is our head, for the whole Christ is head and body." (Sermon 133, 8)

5. Preferential Option for the Least

Canning -- Augustine's use of the expression in Matthew 25, "one of least of mine," 9

With love of neighbor connected to love of God, the vulnerability of the poor and needy is an experience of the humility of God. (Sermon 113, 1, 1)

The path for the journey/pilgrimage continues....

"You have made us, Lord, for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." (Confessions, 1, 1, 1).

"Search in ways to discover, and discover in ways to keep on searching. (The Trinity, IX, 1, 1)

"It is the daily work of Christians to make progress toward God, and to rejoice in God or his gifts always. The time of our pilgrimage, our wandering in exile, is very short, while in our home country time does not exist. After all, between eternity and time there is a considerable difference. Here you are required to show devotion; there you take rest. Thus, like good traders, let us note every day how well we have done, what profit we have made. Not only must we be attentive in listening, but also vigilant in action. This is

a school in which God is the only teacher. It demands good students, those who are enthusiastic in attendance, not those who play hooky.” (Sermon 16A, 1)

“On earth we are always travelers, always on the go. Do not grow complacent with what you are. Where you have become pleased with yourself, there you get stuck. If you say “That’s enough,” you are finished. Always add something more. Keep on walking. Always forge ahead.”(Sermon 169, 18)

1 M.A. Keller, *Human formation and Augustinian Anthropology in Elements of an Augustinian formation*. Rome: Pubblicazione Agostiniane, 2001, 210.

2 F. Galende, *Augustinian Interiority in Our journey back to God: Reflections on Augustinian Spirituality*. Rome: Pubblicazione Agostiniane, 2006, 279.

3 See Keller, 210-211.

4 J.P. Drucker, “Teaching as Pointing in ‘The Teacher.’” *Augustinian Studies* 28-2 (1997), 132.

5 van Bavel, T.J. *The Double Face of Love in Augustine*. *Augustinian Studies*, 17 (1986), 169-181.

6 *Ibid.*, 171.

7 D.X. Burt. *Reflections on a Dying Life*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004, 24.

8 T.J. van Bavel, *Augustine’s spirituality for the Church in the modern world in The Augustinian Family Prepares for the Third Millennium*. T. Cooney (ed.) Rome: Pubblicazione Agostiniane – Curia Generalizia Agostiniana, 1986.

9 R. Canning. *The Unity of Love of God and Love of Neighbour*. Heverlee-Leuven: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993, 331-420.

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