

On Thursday May 8<sup>th</sup> I was about to sit down for lunch in our priory in Clare, Suffolk and my phone rang. It was BBC Radio Suffolk asking me if I would appear on a radio segment the following morning to talk about quiz shows, me having appeared on one once. At the end of the conversation the researcher asked if at the end of the segment the following day they could ask me about the conclave that was taking place in Rome. I said, "Are you going to ask me if I'm backing someone to be the next Pope?" She said, "Why? Are you?" I responded saying, "Robert Prevost", as he belonged to the same religious order as me and I knew him. A few hours later we were sitting down at evening prayer and our mobiles started to go, Fr Robert had been elected.

As you can imagine when I appeared on the radio show very little was asked about quiz shows they wanted to know about the new Pope. And since then that has kind of been the way of things. A few weeks ago I picked up a hire car in Canada and even the people at the Avis rental wanted to know about the new Pope.

I said to the friars I live with this is the best thing that's happened to the order in years. It's a chance to really put ourselves on the map in a positive way. Prior to the election the most famous Augustinian I would say was Martin Luther. We now have a unique chance to present who we are. So when the Tablet asked me to do this webinar I really had to put my money where my mouth was and say yes.

In regard to the Pope I first met him in America, during my novitiate year in 1999 when he invested me and my fellow novices with our first habits as he was Provincial of the Midwest Province. We met with him a few times that year including going on retreat with the Midwest Province in Chicago.

After I returned to the UK he was elected Prior General of the Augustinian order and moved to Rome. Two years later I was sent to Rome to study theology. We lived on the same site at St Monica's the Patristic Institute in Rome. He presided at my solemn profession of vows in Rome so my family have met him as well.

So that's a quick breakdown of myself and the Holy Father. More will come as we go but I think now we will start in earnest with someone whom I think the Holy Father would agree is more important than either of us, St Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine of Hippo is a saint that straddles the fourth and fifth centuries, he is not to be confused with a former archbishop of canterbury also called Augustine that straddles the sixth and seventh centuries. Augustine of Hippo is one of the four doctors of the Catholic Church he was known as one of the great thinkers and theologians of his generation. His thought has shaped the church through the ages.

Augustine wrote a rule on how to live the religious life. He wrote the rule for a community of women which his sister was living in. The rule lasted down through the centuries and was being used by groups of hermits living in caves in Tuscany during the thirteenth century. These hermits were to form one of the first four mendicant orders and were called the Eremitical Friars of St Augustine. The order still exists today and is known as the order of St Augustine. And is the order to which I belong. We can be recognised by our distinctive black habit.

Augustine's most famous writing is, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, and is still in print today. The first nine books deal with Augustine's conversion to Christianity and in the main are autobiographical. However, the genesis of the spirituality we come to know today as Augustinian spirituality can be found in saint Augustine's Confessions.

In regard to our talks we probably need to address a question which may be on many lips. What is Augustinian Spirituality?, ***It's a spirituality centred on the search for God through interiority, love, grace and community (Google)***. When I define terms such as Augustinian Spirituality they are from Google. I wanted something that anyone could look up, easily, also I found the definition concise.

Grace for Augustine is a gift freely given by God that assists us in the living out our lives of faith. Henry Chadwick demonstrates this in, *Augustine A Very Short Introduction*,

*“Those who receive mercy can only be grateful for the grace they had nothing to deserve.”*(p119) Such graces available to us all.

For Augustinians centring our approach to faith on the example of St Augustine himself is a key factor. At the end of the first chapter of the Confessions of St Augustine says to God,

***“Our hearts is restless until it rests in you,” (Confessions St Augustine Bk 1: 5 translated by Benignus O’Rourke)***

This has become one of the most common quotes of St Augustine and has become a prayer for many. For this talk also I find it the key that unlocks the door to Augustinian Spirituality.

Would Augustine prior to his conversion to Christianity describe himself as a restless heart? Most definitely Augustine makes no bones about his restlessness and constant search for a meaning to his life. Throughout his life there were various avenues he walked down seeking purpose, seeking contentment. Lust is a well know trait associated with Augustine, he had a mistress for many years and had a son to that mistress. The son was called Adeodatus, we never learn the mistress’s name. Augustine makes no qualms about his sexual appetite and even when in discernment after he has spurned his mistress he still sees himself as being married. St Monica, Augustine’s mother was to broker an arranged marriage which fell through.

This lack of fidelity to infidelity is the practical implication of the restlessness that Augustine speaks of in the Confessions. Were he to have been successful in his desires and them fully satisfying him then Augustine would have settled into a specific role such as that of lover or the married man. However that doesn’t happen for Augustine, spoiler alert, he is only going to start to garner satisfaction when he fully commits himself to God. We can intimate that Augustine in relationships needs to give fully of himself.

Take friendship for example we hear how important friends are to Augustine and that when he does eventually convert to Christianity he does not convert alone. Friends such as Alypius who was in the garden near Augustine when he made his decision to be a follower of Christ. Alypius subsequently converted alongside Augustine. I said community was a part of Augustinian spirituality that was always the case with St Augustine. Even before his conversion the people around him were important.

We also have Augustine's tempestuous relationship with his mother. His mother, St Monica, whom throughout the Confessions prior to his conversion is pursuing Augustine for God. Augustine is often fleeing from her until the moment of his conversion where she becomes a close confidant and an important part of his conversion story. We see the relationship with St Monica shift but we also still see that full commitment of Augustine to how he deals with the relationship by initially fleeing from her and subsequently bringing Monica into his inner circle.

There are no half measures with Augustine when it comes to relationship. So with this need to fully commit to a relationship why should it be any different with God. So, Augustine when he converts fully throws himself into his relationship with God. There is a difference however, the difference is this time it works. Augustine find his purpose his meaning and with that comes a level of acceptance and serenity both of which he'd have seen as graces from God. In regard to Augustinian spirituality it shows the importance of the Journey we are on and the importance of finding the key destination of that Journey, which is God.

**By accepting God as a crucial part of the reason of living our lives, we begin to embark on our Augustinian journey. The desire or the searching is freely given as a grace from God. So that we find our purpose who we are called to be as God's creation.**

Once Augustine has dealt with his acceptance of God giving him his purpose in life as a believer, from this comes everything else.

Augustine accepting God is the starting point of his Augustinian spirituality. Augustine believed us all to be searching for God. We come back to people or what I call the plurality of Augustine. Note the use of the plural, “our hearts are restless,”. Mathew Levering in his book, *The Theology of Augustine* points out, “*In his retractions Augustine states that his reason for writing his Confessions (wrote during the years 397 – 401) was to move the mind his own and others – towards God in love.* Mathew Levering believes the theme so important it forms his premise as to the purpose of, *The Confessions* for the whole of his chapter on, *The Confessions (The Theology of Augustine, An introductory Guide to His Most Important Works. Mathew Levering, Baker Academic, 2013).*

This searching for God and finding God is a journey we are capable of being on. So for Augustine people find true contentment only when they find God. It also leads us to that key Augustinian charism community we can journey together. By writing *The Confessions* if we hold to the premise of Mathew Levering and indeed Augustine himself in his, *Retractions*, Augustine is inviting us all to experience what he experienced.

*The Confessions* has never gone out of print. There is a constant demand countless people have found the path to God by identifying with this book. God changed Augustine’s life for the better and Augustine believed that same God when encountered in *The Confessions* could do the same for the reader.

**So journeying towards God and acceptance of God in our lives are key concepts in Augustinian spirituality. Such acceptance can be seen as a grace from God.**

The restless phrase says at the end, “until they rest in you” This intimates remaining with God. When we are with someone we are in a relationship with them. To understand our relationship with someone we have to take it on board by interiorizing it and saying yest I am in a relationship with so and so. It means owning the relationship by participating in it and looking at or reflecting on it.

**To own our relationship with God demands a level of interiority. *Interiority for Catholics is the development of a deep and personal relationship with God through prayer and a focus on ones inner spiritual life (google).***

During a papal Audience when speaking on discernment Pope Francis quotes St Augustine from a treatise, On True Religion, “*In the inward person dwells truth,*” (on true religion 39,72) Pope Francis in using the quote is highlighting St Augustine’s being a firm believer of using introspection to find the Lord within oneself. Pope Francis in the same talk had presented how in the Confessions Augustine references his running away from God and God trying to reveal himself to him (Pope Francis Discernment 6. *The elements of discernment, “The book of ones own life 2022*). This is a theme throughout, *The Confessions*, and is written in retrospect.

However, it means Augustine has spent time contemplating his life through the prism of faith and he sees it as an important tool in presenting his faith to himself and others, In book ten he writes,

“*Now I arrive in the fields and vast mansions of memory, where are treasured innumerable images brought in there from objects of every conceivable kind perceived by the senses.*” (*The Confessions of St Augustine Bk X: 8:12 Translated by Maria Boulding*)

Augustine has used memory and recall to demonstrate his journey toward God and his conversion. He goes on to use memory to come to terms with, what he is discovering of God. Remember book tens is the part of the book that is theological treatise than biography.

***Such introspection that can lead to interiority and an inner experience of God is a key factor of what it means to be an Augustinian.***

The idea of biography was not solely inspired by Augustine. Augustine himself read St Athanasius’ biography of St Anthony. Augustine was taken by St Antohny’s asceticism at a time when Augustine was struggling with renouncing worldly temptation.

Augustine appreciated St Athanasius. Augustine as a public speaker had garnered a reputation, Athanasius as a desert Fr had garnered a reputation. And they stepped back from their reputations to develop their faith. As is demonstrated with Augustine reading St Athanasius we have to seek out the conversation. It is believed Augustine read the biography in the summer of 386 after he was told about St Anthony by a high ranking official named Ponticiaus. This was just before his conversion in the late summer of 386 when Augustine was still struggling with the temptations of the world. However, it shows that even in turmoil we can be seeking God by seeking out the conversations and information that can lead us toward him.

Another key figure who features in Augustine's story is St Ambrose of Milan. Ambrose was a bishop of Milan and known for his sermons. Augustine had found himself in Milan after running away from St Monica. He used to go and hear St Ambrose preach to study his technique at public speaking. However some of what Ambrose was preaching got through to Augustine and he slowly started to think more deeply about the possibility of faith. It should be noted that this deepening involved listening to Ambroses exegesis on the scripture preached at mass. He was discovering the value and power of the word of God by pondering on it before his conversion,

St Augustine wasn't the only one to seek out St Ambrose. St Monica, at the time Augustine had joined a sect called the Manichee's, pleaded with Ambrose to meet and speak with Augustine at this point Ambrose refused, Monica pleaded more and vexed he said to her *"It is inconceivable that he should perish a son of tears like yours.."* (*The confessions of St Augustine translated by Maria Boulding; Bk3: Ch12*) Ambrose would eventually be proven right and Augustine would convert. Years later Monica said to Augustine she took Ambrose's words as, *"an oracle from heaven"*.

The seeking out of others for religious discourse never stopped with Augustine. Another wealth of information are the letters of St Augustine. Such as his letters with St Jerome.

So yes, to discuss and explore one's faith is a key characteristic of Augustinian spirituality. This need for communication emphasises the Augustinian charism of community. One of the ways we function as a church community is to discuss and share our faith both on a local level and a wider level. Already Pope Leo has encouraged the Italian Bishops in this. An article in the Vatican news quotes when he addressed the Italian bishops saying,

*“A new impulse is required to proclaiming faith. This means placing Jesus Christ at the centre and following the path indicated by Evangelii Gaudium, helping people to live a personal relationship with him, so they may discover the joy of the Gospel.” (Vatican News website 17<sup>th</sup> June 2025)*

Both the Holy Father and Pope Francis in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* highlight the importance of faith sharing. In relation to the Holy Father pointing out that such sharing demonstrates the need for a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. To avoid the personal relationship Augustine has with God would be to miss a key element in his writing. With this in mind it would be a disservice when presenting Augustine's spirituality to ignore the fact that it is calling us into a personal relationship with God through prayer and the living out of our lives of faith.

The theme of journeying towards God or with God. Is a key Augustinian concept. I said earlier that Augustine wrote the rule for his sister. It is not quite as concise as that. His sister had the responsibility for a group of nuns in Hippo. There were problems in that community so Augustine wrote a letter in which is contained the rule. His letters are often in print and are numbered this letter is 211.

At the beginning of the rule St Augustine references the acts of the apostles, *“The whole group of believers were united, heart and soul.” (acts 4: 32)*. In the rule Augustine paraphrases it to say, *“We are to be one in mind and heart on the way to God”*. (*Rule and constitutions of the Order of Saint Augustine Augustinian press 1981 p13*)



The sense of unity and togetherness that is to be found in the acts quote is contained here in the rule quote also. It also shows the new testament helps him expand on our journeying with and toward God.

But if we are journeying to God yet our hearts are restless until they rest in God, How can we be journeying toward him in the future when we our hearts resting in him in the present? This is an interesting concept for Augustine, in a moment we will go into Augustine's concept of who God is. But at this point I should highlight a theme within *The Confessions* which Augustine develops when exploring who or what God is? In book ten of the confessions chapter 27 Augustine says, "*Late I have loved you beauty so ancient beauty so new, Late have I loved you.*" (*The confessions of St Augustine, Maria Boulding*). This image as God as ancient and new is an important concept that Augustine develops. It also helps with quandary of us journeying toward God and his being in the present.

Time is an interesting concept for Augustine it is linear with a beginning, creation and it is moving toward an end the last judgement. There's a distinction also between human time which is subject to change and mortality and God's time being eternal and unchanging.

In book 1 of the Trinity writes Augustine of God the Father and Jesus the son, "*Not that he does not loves us now, seeing that he did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all (Rom 8:32). It is not as we are however that God loves us, but as we are going to be. For it is as he loves us that he will keep us for ever, and that is as we shall be when he who now makes intercession for us(Rom 8:34) has handed over the kingdom to God and the Father(1 Cor 15:24) and will then no longer beg the Father for us, because the Father himself loves us.(The Trinity, St Augustine: translated by Edmund Hill,O.P Bk 1 Ch21)*

This insight demonstrates how Augustine is developing his sense of God in the present, loving us as the Son but remaining true to his statement of God as, *a beauty ever ancient ever new*,.

It also has the principle of God being with us in the present through our Christian faith but we are also journeying towards the creator God.

It raises and begins to explain an important and obvious question that needs addressing, **Who is God to Augustine?** A newly converted Augustine was aware of God's presence in the present but also his existence as the creator from the beginning of time. However Augustine's sense of the nature of God continued to develop.

Augustine's spirituality develops by broadening his interiority. His use of scripture becomes more of a tool. Augustine reflects not on just his life experience but also the experience of Jesus and other key figures in scripture. And through this God reveals more of himself to Augustine. In the book, *The Trinity* Augustine presents a triune God. *Dei Trinitate* (The Trinity) by using scripture delves into the nature of God. *Dei Trinitate* was printed around 426. It is believed that an early manuscript was stolen so it went to print early.

So, as we are journeying to God we are also journeying with him and this has been the way since the dawn of creation. **God for Augustine is ancient divine but with his trinitarian nature is also present and relevant in our lives and our salvific history.**

This sense of the presence of God is there from the moment of his conversion. Also from that moment is the presence of God through scripture. Not only present but communicating. *In The Confessions book 8 Chapter 29* Augustine talks of his moment of conversion to the Lord. He begins by recounting his anguish at putting off the Lord, each day feeling not ready. Augustine recounts being in a garden in anguish about not committing to God so he takes himself off alone. He is in turmoil asking God why he can't commit, Then he hears a child at play saying a phrase over and over again, "*tolle lege, tolle lege*" (pick up and read pick up and read).

He felt this was a sign from God he went back to where he had been sitting reading the letters of St Paul opened the book randomly and his eyes rested on,

*“Let us live decently as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in discord and Jealousy. Instead put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the flesh to arouse no desires.” (Roman 13: 13 – 14)*  
*(The confessions of St Augustine Bk8 Ch29 translated by Maria Boulding)*

Augustine goes on to say “ *I did not read further, there was no need. For in an instance as I came to the end of the sentence it was as if a light of certainty flooded my heart and the dark shadows of doubt were dispelled.* ”(Confessions bk 8 Ch29 translated by Maria Boulding)

I said earlier Augustinian spirituality is a spirituality centred on the search for God through interiority, love, grace and community. All of these elements are present at the time of his conversion he is searching and in turmoil in the garden. It's not always easy searching for God especially if we feel we aren't getting anywhere yet we are told to persevere. Augustine receives a grace and discerns that the child saying pick up an read, pick up and read is a God instance which he accepts and responds to going back to the book he had been reading. And, upon trusting to faith he discerns the words on the text as a grace like instance or moment of revelation. This then gives him a sense of God's love for him, which he describes as ‘*a light of certainty flooding his heart.*’ When recounting the incident to St Monica Augustine recounts to God in the confessions that she told him she immediately thanked God for what he had done.

We see the genesis of God's presence through scripture in, The Confessions (400AD) A God that can reach out to him through scripture to what it develops to when Augustine writes Dei Trinity (416AD) Scripture can help provide a deeper understanding as to the nature of God.

There is also the sense of discerning God in others (the child saying tolle legge, tolle legge) gave Augustine a real life experience of God being present in the moment after Augustine picked up and read.

Augustine's desire for God is unquenchable. So when he writes conversationally with God in *The Confessions*, he feels he is truly communicating with God. Which is why certain texts from his writings have been turned into prayer.

**So, God for Augustine's is the God of the New Testament and can communicate directly with Augustine through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, through prayer, by grace, interiority and the people around him (his community). God is Trinity and truly a beauty ever ancient and new.**

God can give us the fuel to do what we need to do if we feel he is calling us to do it. That realisation can sometimes seem instantaneous such as the moment of Augustine's conversion in 386 or more gradual such as the moment of Augustine's writing of *The Confessions* between 397 and 400. As he writes he is coming to know God more. And the more he writes he is coming to know the power of contemplation through introspection. Patience is not a quality often associated with Augustine but it must have been there in abundance because he is constantly developing his faith through his writing and his life and going over such events to seek God at work in his life.

I share these themes to demonstrate that they run throughout the writing of Augustine and that the Augustinians haven't plucked them out of thin air they are there present. And, that is what we do with Augustine we use his writings now written over two thousand years ago and apply them to our faith today. And its not just Augustinians. It is generally accepted that St Augustine was the most quoted non scriptural source at the Secon Vatican Council (1962 – 1965).

I'd like now to conclude prior to questions by presenting bullet points of what I have shared in regard to Augustinians spirituality. That I think cohesively present what we see as Augustinians spirituality.

- **Augustinian** spirituality is centred on St Augustine's sense of God through interiority, **love grace and community.**

- Acceptance of God in our lives and how we come to that realisation is the starting point for Augustinian spirituality. **The desire or the searching is freely given as a grace from God.** So that we find our purpose who we are called to be as his creation.
- Acceptance can come from owning the journey we are on. *“Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, Oh God.”* **Such acceptance can be seen as another grace from God. It is also the starting point of Augustinian Spirituality.**
- To own our relationship with God demands a level of interiority. **Interiority** for Catholics is **the development of a deep and personal relationship with God through prayer and a focus on ones inner spiritual life.**
- Introspection can lead to **interiority** and an inner experience of God is a key factor of what it means to be an Augustinian.
- Who is God to Augustine? **He is “Beauty ever ancient, beauty ever new.”**
- God for Augustine is **ancient divine** but through his trinitarian nature **is also present** and relevant in our lives and our salvific history found in scripture.
- God can communicate directly with Augustine and us all through **the Gospel of Jesus Christ, prayer, grace, community and interiority.**

