

In an address to the college of Cardinals Pope Leo XIV said he chose the papal name Leo for various reasons. Primarily he pointed to the social teaching of Pope Leo XIII in particular for his advocating the right of workers during the first industrial revolution. He also highlighted the former pope's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and its relevance in regard to AI and its impact on human dignity and labour. Pope Leo XIV stated,

*“Pope Leo XIII in his historical encyclical Rerum Novarum addressed the social question in the context of the first great industrial revolution. In our own day, the Church offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defence of human dignity, justice and labour. (Pope Leo XIV, Address Of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV To The College Of Cardinals, Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2025, multimedia)*

It is no accident that the newly elected Pope had come across Pope Leo XIII who is known as having been a benefactor of the order to the point of rebuilding an Augustinian Church that had gone into disrepair in his home town. He also ordained Augustinians to cardinal and had a longstanding relationship with the order.

It would be a disservice not to acknowledge the former pope's relationship to the order to which the current pope has served so long. However, I for one can rest assured on the social teaching reason as being the dominant driving factor. Firstly because the Pope said it himself and secondly it fits with a Pope who has so long been an advocate of the rights of both the poor and those that labour in Peru where he has spent much of his ministry.

This does not mean that Leo XIV though has not been influenced or shaped by his being a member of the Augustinian order. It would be naive to think that Augustinian spirituality would not be a part of his make up having been an Augustinian Friar for so long and holding such important roles as being a Provincial and Prior General.

Augustinians have for a long time been deeply engaged with Catholic social teaching. As well as church ministry we teach have

chaplains in prisons, hospital and schools. The Augustinians order is also an accredited non governmental organisation (NGO) at the United Nations known as Augustinians International. We have missions throughout the world striving to improve the rights of the poor, the marginalised and the lowest paid workers. At Clare Priory we run one of the most prestigious craft fairs in the country which each year raises thousands for local charities.

When beginning a talk on practical application of spirituality it might seem strange to begin with talking about social issues. Rather than say, “go pray and contemplate”. However, it is apt.

Augustine sees engaging in social issues as part of our spiritual process, in a letter where he writes to the people of Hippo he says,

*“ I’ve been told that you have forgotten your practice of providing clothing for the poor; I urged this work of mercy on you when I was with you and urge it on you now, so that you will not be overcome and made slothful by the destruction of this world. The things that you see happening are just those that our Lord and Redeemer who cannot lie foretold.” (Letters of St Augustine: John Leinenweber: To the Clergy and people of Hippo)*

Augustine is presenting an action of faith and social justice such as providing clothing for the poor as a way of staying centred as a person of Christian faith. It means that practical application of faith is important. Augustine responded to the world he lived in with faith.

Being Augustinian is a state of being. It is living a life of faith that draws on St Augustine. This presentation will offer reflections to help focus on this. ***First I want you to think about any act of charity or voluntary contribution to the environment that you participate or have participated in. If you can’t think of a thing then think of what or how can you do something charitable. But now I don’t want you to see it as an act of charity or as merely being kind but to see it as an act of faith.***

***It’s the difference of doing something to feel good or doing something because you’re called to it.***

The point here is that action for Augustine and the Augustinian goes hand in hand with who they are as a person of faith. Owning this means we enter into the process of being Augustinian.

It is here I can also give an example of the practical application of this from our present Pope. When I studied theology in Rome I lived on the same site as the Augustinian Curia (the governing body of the order). Pope Leo XIV was the Prior General of the order.

He led an initiative within the Curia that on high days and holy day the leadership would come and dine with us in the student house. Any festa or celebration and they would be there.

Also when we had our annual retreat they would come on retreat with us. Something the current Curia does not do. It might seem like a simple thing but again it speaks of living and sharing the Augustinian life with one another. Pope Leo at that time showed the Augustinian students what we mean by community by sharing his time with us.

And the pope has always been a big advocate of the importance of contributing to community. He received my solemn profession of vows in 2003. My parents were in attendance and in his sermon he preached about them offering their son to the ministerial life and how it made them a part of the Augustinian family. At the end of the service he presented them with a certificate. The certificate states their affiliation to the order but it also says.

*“Henceforth we consider you as members of our Family in the same way as those who are members by their profession of their religious vows.” (certificate presented November 1<sup>st</sup> 2003)*

An extremely personal gesture but also very Augustinian. This shows the reality of the practice of us journeying together one in mind and heart. It is also faith through community by contributing to it.

This may seem very basic and simple, it is. But that’s how it starts. The Augustinian journey starts with a conversion, it’s an action, Augustine could have theorized his life away but he didn’t he made the choice. ***So we need to act to live, lives of faith.***

In most Augustinian provinces now there are groups known as, *The Friends of St Augustine*. They are a combination of religious brothers and sisters and lay people. That get together to discuss and discover Augustine through his writings and the writing of scholars on Augustine and this often includes reflecting on the scriptures that shaped and influenced Augustine's thought process and spiritual life. So as well as coming together in fraternity of faith as Augustinians, so is coming together as a group to explore faith through Augustine. The last international meeting of, *The Friends of St Augustine* was in Rome in July 2024. I was told by parishioners who attended that the Pope who was then a cardinal came and celebrated mass and had a meal with them. He preached on Augustinian spirituality and the synodal process.

I can't draw on what he said about Augustinian Spirituality and the synodal process because I wasn't there. However, it shows Pope Leo's commitment to Augustinian's be the lay people or consecrated.

The vice president of the Augustinians patristical institute Fr Juan Antonio Cabera O.S.A in an article on the ongoing formation process points out that although Augustine does not use the word synodality he uses other terms. Fr Juan Antonio says of Augustine,

*"The essence of his ecclesiological thought is extremely Christological and this must lead us as Augustinians, to understand from this Christological perspective, the three pillars – communion, participation and mission – on which the synodal process is based. ("Cabera O.S.A, Reflections on the Synodal process based on Augustinian ecclesiology, Augustinian curia, cena 2, cicolo pdf")*

Fr Juan Antonio goes on to present seeing this as the Church reaffirming herself as the people of God. It places being Augustinian as having something to offer the synodal process.

Community being a charism of ours this should come as no surprise. It means we have something to offer to the modern church. **What is it that we have to offer?**

Augustine at times can be difficult to read. Early on in my training I had the privilege during my novitiate year of being taken through, *The Confession of St, Augustine* by, Brian Lowry O.S.A, who was at that time the prior of one of our convents, in San Gian Mignano in Tuscany. Fr Brian was known for taking people through the book. He taught me something I never forgot which is a key for me to reading Augustine.

Augustine was a once in a lifetime mind. He was a philosopher, a theologian, a bibliophile, scripture scholar, Bishop, priest, public speaker, convert, reformed sinner and a very honest man. When Augustine writes he writes as himself and all of this is in there he is not playing at being the philosopher or reformed sinner they are a part of his make up. Part of who he is. What this means is that when we read Augustine we can come from various angles. In other words the parts of his nature that speaks to us. If I am reading something difficult I can look for the convert or the passion within him that helps me understand. I can get to a line like, "Late have I loved you beauty ever ancient beauty ever knew." It means I can reflect and see that it is the destination we aim for and as difficult as some of the theory is there is a goal that is worth achieving so I read on. This may sound like wishful thinking but I can assure you it works because that how I read Augustine.

The first book I read was *Dei Trinitate* it is known as a difficult tract to read. It is, but the way Augustine writes it is in a dramatic and prayerful fashion which I allowed to pull me along and it worked. The trick is to get to the end of the chapter. Read on not to start again by doing this I find the parts of the text that speak to me.

This means in group sharing on Augustine, we all have something to offer because we can come at Augustine from differing angles meaning we can learn from one another.

It is also an indicator of what we can offer the modern Church. We talk about community and think in the plural but we are not clones

of one another. Some of us can be more private than others that does not mean we don't have something to offer one another.

The next reflection is, *Am I willing to participate in the process of faith by simply being the person of faith God created me to be? But what if we feel we don't have something to offer.*

If we have the willingness we are participating in a spiritual process that literally starts with Christ. Where would we as a people of faith be if he and his disciples had not shared their faith and their experience of faith with us? Also the people that invited them into their homes were participating in the faith. There are so many different way in which we can participate and there need to be because we are all so diverse.

Speaking in public is not a skillset we necessarily all possess. We are not all saints and we are not all as eloquent as St Augustine. In the early eighties I was a member of a youth theatre. And I performed a play at a national youth theatre festival in Telford. Someone did a review of the play I was in. It was a short review and had grammatical errors because the person who wrote it could hardly read or write. He praised the production saying it really spoke to him and reminded of his past and where he had come to in the present. I have never forgotten that review or the person who gave it. It was the best one I ever received.

We do not have to be the most eloquent or great debaters. We just have to be willing to participate. What I am talking about here is a willingness to participate in the discussion of faith. We don't necessarily have to speak.

I said yes to being a priest while backpacking around South East Asia. What I actually said was okay God if you think so I'll give it a try. One night shortly after my decision while reading the bible, I thought of the disciples and how they were all different. There were Tax collectors, zealots and fishermen among them. I wanted to be a priest that regardless of difference could be brought to a common ground by Christ. It was what I saw as priesthood.

A few months later after developing a taste for St Augustine. I contacted the Augustinians while discerning my vocation. I was invited to spend a weekend with a community in Hammersmith. It was grand national weekend and the friars all drew horses from a sweepstake. There was a lot of banter going on then we all went into the dining room for lunch. Suddenly the banter stopped and the prayer books came out and the Friars prayed as a community regardless of differences and banter. I thought of my reflection of apostleship while in Thailand and I thought yest this is it, this is what I am being called to.

This is the power of diversity and grace. The gifts we have been given in life, the insights we make into our life of faith. All free graces we receive from God for us to share with one another. We do not always see our graces as graces. Take being shy for example. At Clare we have a spoken word group one person comes who doesn't share verbally but just listens to what is being said, she is one of the most important member of the group.

***It leads to another reflection. Can I accept the graces I cam given as being for the betterment of the Kingdom of God.*** It starts to give us a different way of viewing ourselves that even our weaknesses or flaws can be strengths when viewed as gifts from God.

I said near the beginning of this talk that there might be an expectation when talking about Augustinian spirituality to go pray and contemplate. Also, yesterday I did not deal on who God was for Augustine and how God communicates with us until near the end. This has been deliberate. God for Augustine is the raisin detre he is the beginning and the end. Augustine's realisation of who God was to him did not really start to develop until the time leading up to his conversion.

It brings me back to our current Pope. Someone told me there was an image of him the day before his election of him sitting with his head in his hands. Now I cannot say but his name may have been mentioned by then and yes he had to take time to pray and to think fortunately as an Augustinians that is in his very nature. But also by

being used to such introspection it provides the ability to say yes and to realise that it is the Lord calling him to ministry and not just the college of cardinals. It won't have been the first time he said yes to God and it won't be the last. Again, such introspection would come natural to him as an Augustinian.

Augustine was thirty one years old when he converted to Christianity his life had led him to that point. But he realised God had always been in the background of his life.

In the mid nineties prior to my following my vocation I was a lost soul. Fortunately one of the places where I went looking for direction was the confessional. The priest there recommended I try Ignatian meditation. So I started doing some Ignatian exercises.

During one of the exercises, which would have involved prayer and reflecting on a piece of scripture, I reflected on a period of my life where I thought I was quite miserable as a young child when being badly bullied. But then I thought it was at that time that a priest encouraged me to start serving on the altar. It made me think of other happy memories with family and friends and I had this realisation of God being in the background of my life looking out for me whether I had realised it or not. In reflection it was a pattern I saw repeating throughout my life. I felt it as a moment of revelation and see it now as a blessing.

Although it was an Ignatian exercise the introspection and contemplation that came out of it is very Augustinian. It shows the power of such endeavours when done in the correct parameters. We are not talking here about naval gazing but contemplating on our journey of faith and experiencing God in our lives. Something all Christians are called to be they Jesuit or Augustinian.

God was in the background of Augustine's life as he is for us all. Often there is the danger of forgetting this or of something in our lives making a louder noise in our thoughts, then it can be hard to discern God if we are not practicing our faith regularly. It is not the Augustinian way to neglect God or to forget him or the importance of journeying with him.

Which is why I feel it is both good and right to deal with God's Identity and his communication as we near the end of our talk, because God is our raisin d'etre.

Pope Leo XIV said in a homily recently of St Paul and the disciples after the council of Jerusalem when telling the Church in Antioch of the realisations they had come to,

*“ They emphasised that the most important part of the entire event was listening to God's voice, which made everything else possible. In this way they remind us communion is built primarily on our knees, through prayer and constant commitment to the conversation. ”*  
(Homily given at papal mass for the possession of the chair of the Bishop of Rome holy see press office bulletin 25<sup>th</sup> May 2025)

The Pope goes on to say only in this way we can we hear God's Spirit. Praying to God, spending time with God is not an after thought it is a given.

Reflection can come from seeking quiet, sitting in silence and reflecting, some journal, others may want to discuss and discern with a spiritual director, and others just interiorize the process and there are those that may do a combination of these things. Reflection can also come from praying the rosary together, praying the divine office and celebrating the Eucharist.

It can come in private times and in public times such as their being people in the garden when Augustine had his conversion experience. What is important be it private or public is that we reflect on the faith experience in our hearts.

The pope, in his papal homily at the mass for the reception of the Chair of the Bishop of Rome, has a defence for contemplation and interiority when discerning our faith experience,

*“We remember that is we reflect in our hearts upon what we have experienced and learned, in order to more fully understand its meaning and to savour its beauty.”* (Homily given at papal mass for the possession of the chair of the Bishop of Rome holy see press office bulletin 25<sup>th</sup> May 2025)

*Bearing in mind what I have said about praying privately or praying in a public setting. It's a technique I learnt from the book, *The Way of a Pilgrim*. That has the pilgrim using, the Jesus Prayer, in a manner similar to what I am about to describe. (*The Way a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, Olga Savin, Shambhala classics 2001) It involves choosing a short piece of scripture and we will now have approximately a five minute meditation using the technique.*

**I breathe a short breath in My Lord and a long breath out My God (Jn 20:28). A short breath in long breath out is a form of cognitive therapy that helps regulate and calm ones body. I have adapted this with contemplative prayer.**

**So lets try this technique. I recommend you close your eyes. Before we get to the phrase lets focus on our breathing remember it's a short breath in and along breath out, a short breath in and a long breath out. So get into the rhythm of doing that. Any thoughts that come are just like a ripple on a pond let them come let them go just keep focusing on a short breath in and a long breath out. So lets just do that a few times. Now with the next short breath in focus on my lord don't say it just breathe it. Do that two or three times and then introduce and my God to the long breath out.**

**Remember any thoughts are as wisps of wind rippling on a pond, you don't have to worry about them don't focus on them just focus on the breathing and the phrase, My Lord and my God I will now go quiet for a period of time.**

**Ok so now we are going to come back to the webinar when ready open your eyes and start to focus on me and what I am saying. But as we come round I want to say something about those ripples or wisps of thought that came. At this point you might want to write them down or just make a mental note of it. See what they are saying to you, has the Holy Spirit revealed something or did you simply feel closer to God whatever it may be own it treasure it and use it as Augustine would as a grace from God.**

In a letter to Proba a widow Augustine says of prayer, “So, we pray in faith hope and love with uninterrupted desire. But at certain hours and seasons we also pray with words. We use these signs of realities to rouse ourselves to become aware of the growth of our desire and to strongly move ourselves to increase it. The more fervent the feeling in our hearts the more worthwhile will be its effects. What do the Apostles word, “pray constantly,” mean if not that we must constantly desire the happy life, which is nothing else than eternal life from the one who alone can give it.” (Leinwever John, *Letters of St Augustine, Selected and Edited in a new translation, Triumph Books*)

Scripture and prayer for Augustine are as important as acting on faith both can show a deeper understanding of God and the kingdom of God. Nor should we forget conversation, debate and, of course many spiritual writings such as the Saints need I say St Augustine and other writings. All ways of living a life of faith and experiencing God.

To surmise though I think it only right I quote the Holy Father one more time.

*“First the spirit teaches us the Lord’s words by impressing them deep within us written, as the biblical image would have it, no longer on tablets of stone but in our hearts(cf Jer 31:33).*

*This gift helps us grow and become a letter of Christ (cf, 2Cor 3:3) for one another. Naturally the more we let ourselves be convinced and transformed by the Gospel – allowing the power of the spirit to purify our heart to make our words straight forward, our desires honest and clear, and our actions generous – the more capable we are of proclaiming its message.”*

*(Homily given at papal mass for the possession of the chair of the Bishop of Rome holy see press office bulletin 25<sup>th</sup> May 2025)*

For me it is the perfect summation of what we have been talking about. I often tell our parishioners how lucky we are to have a faith where our higher power isn’t sitting on a throne reading a book.

No he is right down here standing next to us. In our words thoughts and actions of faith.

With the coming of this Holy Father we have entered a new phase of faith but that is nothing new. We have constantly been on shifting sands but when it comes to God we are dealing with, a *beauty ever ancient, ever new*. He has seen it all before, all he wants of us is to bring him into the mix through our life journeys and life stories making them our faith journeys and faith stories leading us on to the kingdom of God. And we all have something to offer each other .

I hope these talks have been productive and have helped over the two evenings and remember you can always find us at Clare.

Please keep Pope Leo XIV in your prayers and if you wouldn't mind a few prayers for the Augustinian order wouldn't go amiss also. I have to get used to calling him Pope Leo and not looking at his picture in the papers and thinking that's Bob. So, yes the Order and it's Friars need prayers also. I'll now answer questions.

### **Reflections on how to be Augustinian.**

- By involving oneself in community by such things as acts of charity, means we enter into the process of being Augustinian. Think about any act of charity or voluntary contribution to the environment that you participate in as an act of faith rather than act of charity. It's the difference of doing something to feel good about yourself or doing something because you're called to it.
- **So we need to act to live, lives of faith.**
- Can I accept myself as a gift from God Warts and all?

- **Am I willing to participate in the process of faith by simply being the person of faith God created me to be?**
- It is Augustinian to think we all have something to offer and we can learn from each others differences such differences can be a grace from God.
- ***A contemplative prayer:* Any thoughts that come are just like a ripple on a pond let them come let them go just keep focusing on a short breath in and a long breath out. So lets just do that a few times. Now breathe, My Lord and my God. Short breath in long breath out. This can be done with eyes open or shut in private or public even on a bus.**
- Any thought that comes from prayer or meditation you might want to write down or make a mental not of. See what they are saying to you, has the Holy Spirit revealed something or did you simply feel closer to God whatever it may be own it treasure it.
- *“First the spirit teaches us the Lord’s words by impressing them deep within us written, as the biblical image would have it, no longer on tablets of stone but in our hearts(cf Jer 31:33).  
(Homily given at papal mass for the possession of the chair of the Bishop of Rome holy see press office bulletin 25<sup>th</sup> May.*