

Communion of Life in St Augustine

(Based on article by Art Pucaro and the 'Continental Animation Team')

Introduction:

'Being of one heart and one mind on the way to God'

'We need our fellows in order to be ourselves'

'Life without friends is an exile'

The 'communal' aspect characterises Augustine's thought at all times, it is the basic element of Augustinian spirituality. How can we analyse it and put it into practice? What does it mean or lay groups of FoA? There are three levels:

Anthropological, Theological and Social.

Community as an Anthropological Place

Too often we focus only on the 'spiritual' aspect of fellowship: prayer, liturgy, ministry; insufficient attention is paid to developing as mature personalities in community. Christ came to inaugurate the 'new man' in all aspects: body, soul and spirit - feet on the ground and spirit raised to the heavens; the testimony of a full humanity. We cannot become divine without being human!

The Challenge of the Human

Today people are moved by the witness of 'a human and humanising community' more than a 'spiritual' community which may be immature. Vatican II speaks of a new humanism: modern man is critical, looking for authenticity, looking to the future rather than content with tradition, independent of imposed hierarchy. We belong to our global community and must learn from and respond to the good aspects of this vision and testify to God's power to make us fully human.

- Self-esteem, clarity about our vision of life and hope, awareness of our own 'inner man' with his/her emotions, faults, complexes.
- Personal responsibility, creativity, freedom.
- Ability to reach out to others: respect, courtesy, praise, forgiveness, kindness.

To live our human adventure and experience of faith in fellowship with others requires us to face this challenge of personal maturity - which community can help us to do.

The Utopia of the Community as an Anthropological Place (General Chapter 1992)

- A community that welcomes: open, affable, affectionate, tolerant.
- A community that promotes: personal maturity and self-fulfilment and also solidarity in community.
- A community that proposes: expresses to the world a witness of friendship and fellowship.

Aspects of immaturity which will affect our fellowship:

- Unrealistic expectations of holiness: we are on our way to perfection, not already there! Must grant each other a generous margin for shortcomings otherwise authentic

community not possible.

- Allowing conflict to become personal. Sensitivity, resentment, cliquiness.
- Lack of self-awareness: nobody can understand anyone unless they understand themselves; we can't give ourselves if we don't know ourselves.
- Falsity: concealing our true intentions.
- Complexes and personality problems: we all have these; we need help to understand and overcome our own internal conflicts.

Growing Towards Communion

Fellowship, communion of life takes work! There is a whole process of growth and maturation to construct an authentic community with close relationships. Often we want to live in communion without accepting the task that this implies. The stages on this journey are summarised in the diagram:

- The Person: task of growth in self-knowledge, acceptance, self-esteem. Task of identifying goals and hopes and seeing the need of fellowship with others in order to grow and realise vocation of family of God.
- The Group: We develop a taste for being together: reveal ourselves at an external level - what we do, general topics.
- The Community: start to sacrifice own interests for the common good; share values, opinions, what is important. Take risk of opening up.
- Christian Community: Christ is the centre and model: we not only want to be together but want together what God wants and share thoughts and values at deeper level.
- Augustinian Community: 'The search for God in a community in which we share our faith and our life, which inspires us in our service of the church. '
 - o Authentic human relations inspired by love not power.
 - o Every aspect of life in common is in itself and exercise in asceticism.
 - o Sign of hope: modern society based on productivity and utility, activity not on fellowship and who you are.

THE COMMUNITY AS A THEOLOGICAL PLACE

The other is a 'theological place' a meeting place with God: I encounter God in the person of my brother or sister because God is in the other. We cannot know, love and serve Jesus without loving and serving our brothers and sisters - for we are all the body of Christ. It is the most authentic way of loving God!

AUGUSTINIAN THEOLOGY OF THE COMMUNITY

The community not only enriches us psychologically but also theologically: it is the best way of seeking, finding, loving and bearing witness to our God.

'All united in Christ towards God'

'See how good and satisfying it is to see brothers living in unity' Ps 132.

This is the Augustinian charism: we are a group of Christians freely gathered to march towards God, living in fraternal communion.

- Trinity: The Trinity is full communion of life and love between the three Divine Persons - this is our model: we are called to live united in love, in full communion with profound interpersonal relationships.
- Eschatological: community is the announcement and sign of the heavenly City of God in which perfect communion and fellowship is achieved. There 'each one will have also what he does not have, because, although he does not possess it in himself, he loves it in his fellow, and, loving it he possesses it. Furthermore the diversity of splendour will not arouse envy, since the unity of love will reign in all'

- Christological: our union is achieved in Christ - as we allow him, through the Spirit, to teach us and fill us with his love, so we become one mind and heart with each other and become 'the whole Christ'.
- Ecclesial: communion of life in each small group is a witness of what the life of the church is meant to be. Augustinian vision is to be a community and create a community, to make communion of life a reality, as a model for the church and prophetic announcement of God's plan called to be lived in this world and perfectly in the next.
- Local Historic Dimension: The local Christian community should offer society the witness become reality of an alternative style of living, more human and more humanising, based on communion not individualism.

THEOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS!

This communion of life is the ideal model which Augustine dreamed of and constructed in the course of 40 years! But he was realistic - sin and selfishness exist! His answer to how it is possible to aspire to this ideal is:

- Prayer!
- Humility, humility, humility 'All the other vices are fed by sin but pride is fed by virtue itself!'
- Communion of goods.

IMAGES OF COMMUNION OF LIFE

- The Temple
- The Bread of the Eucharist
- The Choir

| TOWARDS COMMUNION OF LIFE (COMMUNITY SANCTITY) | |
|--|--|
| I. PROCESS OF GROWTH | II. LEVELS OF DIALOGUE |
| Person Identity: Self-knowledge Self-esteem | Silence - cliché Need to come out of isolation and to relate |
| Group Being together Common objective Functional relations Leader: authoritarian | Information- external Revealing oneself only at external level: News What we are doing Affects the way of situating ourselves vis-a-vis our fellow: - Equality in dignity - Respect for diversity |
| Community Wanting to be Together Anthropological principles: need for an authentic functional and flexible structure. Psychological principles: intercommunication, interaction and common objective Sociological principles: interdependence when it comes to information, decision-taking and action. | Ideas - internal Opinions Who we are |
| Christian Community To seek together what God wants | Feelings - inner man Fears and hopes |

| | |
|---|--|
| Community of Faith Community of Prayer Community of Charity Missionary Community | Profound feelings |
| Augustinian Community <i>Inner man:</i> communal search for God Community Life: Communion of goods, both spiritual and material Service to the Church: As a community | Communion- with others, with God Sharing ideal values Sharing the search for God The profound meaning of things You and I come to feel ourselves Us |

Given by Paul at the Friends of Augustine, Clare Group monthly meeting May 2010.