

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

Happy Feast of St Augustine our Patron Saint to you!

Last Sunday, the Word of God reminded us, “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us, while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith” (Hebrew 12:1-2).

This Sunday, there is a striking note of invitation to people of all nations to come to the Lord. We find this in the first reading where the Lord says, “I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; they shall come and see my glory” (Isaiah 66:18). In the same reading, the word of God stated that the Lord will send survivors who “shall bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations as an offering to the LORD” (Isaiah 66:19). The Lord indicated that he will even choose priests and Levites from those non-Israelites (Isaiah 66:21). Christ Jesus fulfilled this by bringing us all into his Church which is God’s kingdom on earth.

In the response to the responsorial Psalm, the Word of God says, “Go out to all the world and tell the Good News” (Mark 16:15). The Gospel harmonizes this note when it reads, “People will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29). What this says is that God is not a private deity of a particular nation. He is the God of all nations and all are his children. Christian religion is not a private religion. It is public. It is for all nations and peoples. This brings us to the theme of the homily today, St Augustine our saint and a model. The Lord Jesus is the supreme model for all of us. He is the way, the truth and life. Jesus is “the narrow gate,” the only way of salvation, the path by which all must travel to enter the kingdom of the Father (see John 14:6). The saints like St Augustine are the authoritative interpretations of the Lord. They point to the Lord. St Augustine, did this in a unique way. When he was younger he did not embrace this mission of making the Lord known. He sowed wild oats. He got himself into a lot of mess and moral quagmire. The moment the Lord answered the prayer of his mother, St Augustine converted, he made a big turnaround to the Lord. He made this confession in his book known as Confessions of St Augustine:

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would have not been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace”
(Confessions, Book 10, chapter 27).

From then on, St Augustine spent his life pointing the way to the Lord. He never looked back. From the time he was baptized on Holy Saturday in the year 387 AD in Milan, he employed his talents and training in serving the Lord. He became a man of deep prayer.

He founded a community of like-minded people who lived, prayed and studied together. During his lifetime, he fought three heresies inimical to the gospel message. These heresies were Donatism, Pelagianism and Manicheanism. Against Donatism, he upheld that grace builds on nature, against Pelagianism, he held that grace is necessary, against Manicheanism he upheld the goodness of the material universe as coming from the hand of Him who is the Truth, Beauty and the Good. He defended the dignity of the human person. Being a Christian and a true statesman, he defended his diocese against the vandals. He took his life in his hand and went to the strong man of the vandals and persuaded him not to destroy the city. He clearly taught that destruction of human life no matter how young and small is evil. In his work "On Cloud and Craving", St Augustine decried the destruction of the precious life in the womb as sinful and inhuman. He wrote, "Sometimes this lustful cruelty or cruel lust resorts to such extravagant methods as to use poisonous drugs to secure barrenness; or else, if unsuccessful in this, to destroy the conceived seed by some means previous to birth, preferring that its offspring should rather perish than receive vitality; or if it was advancing to life within the womb, should be slain before it was born" (*De Nube et Concupiscentia* 1.17 ,15). He also made it clear in his teaching that we are made for God. Confessing this to God, St Augustine wrote, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You. Grant, O Lord that I may know and understand which is my first obligation" (Confessions, 1.1.1, 10.27.1).

In the light of these, one may ask, are we at Liberty to disdain the discipline of the Lord? Is it wise to follow our own way when it is contrary to God's way? No, it is unwise. The Word of God says, "My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges"(Hebrews 12:5-6).

Are we free not to evangelize? Are we at liberty to hoard the message of God? St Augustine our patron saint teaches us otherwise. He wrote, "To fall in love with God is the greatest romance; to seek him the greatest adventure; to find him, the greatest human achievement" We must then utilize any opportunity we have not only to fall in love with God but to help our brothers and sisters to do the same. This is evangelization.

The next question is what does St Augustine Catholic Church mean for me? Do I see it as a stepping stone to heaven? Or do I view it as a place where I further my worldly ambition or political agenda? St Augustine sought the mind of God and followed it. In the issues of our day, do I yield to political exigency and convenience or do I follow the truth no matter where it leads. Do I make up my own rules and thereby make myself into a god? Do I stand with Jesus or do I stand somewhere else? Do I remind myself that, "Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it." What can I do to help further the evangelizing mission of St Augustine Catholic Church?