

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

THE LESSON: A RESTLESS HEART FINDS REST

*“There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”
(Luke 15:10)*

“You (O Lord) have made man for Yourself and restless is the human heart until it comes to rest in You”. Chances are, you’ve heard these words before. They were written by Augustine sixteen centuries ago – a man who knew all about the restlessness of the human heart.

Augustine was born in a city called Tagaste (in modern-day Algeria in North Africa) to a devout Christian mother and an unbelieving father. Though his mother pleaded and prayed for him to come to faith and lead a moral life, Augustine spent most of his youth doing just the opposite. He took a mistress, and experimented with many of the philosophies and false religions that were popular in his day. He was over thirty years old when his restless heart took him to Milan. It was there that he met and came to be mentored by Ambrose (who is also a saint in the Church’s calendar).

Augustine’s famous autobiography, “Confessions”, tells of his struggle to leave behind his life of sin. It goes on to tell the story of his hearing a child’s voice one day directing him to read from St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans, where he found these words: “Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy” (13:13). After reading these words of scripture, Augustine wrote, “I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away”. Augustine became a Christian and was baptized at the church in Milan at the Easter Vigil in 387.

*“Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge
after the image of its creator.”
(Colossians 3:10)*

All of the different things Augustine had tried in his earlier life had failed to satisfy him, but he knew that his new faith in Christ required more than nominal adherence. Augustine, like many of his contemporaries, was deeply affected by Athanasius’ biography of the early monk and desert father, Anthony. After his baptism, Augustine planned to live a life influenced by monastic ideals. He parted with his mistress, sold his property, and together with some friends back home in Northern Africa, began to live a communal life of simplicity, study and devotion.

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love him.”
(1 Corinthians 2:9)*

All that he had previously experienced in life equipped Augustine in a unique way to defend and build up the faith. He was ordained and became bishop of Hippo (in Algeria), where he remained until his death at the age of 76. During those decades, Augustine preached and wrote extensively. He also convened three councils (in 393, 397, and 419) to ensure that works which were not scripture weren’t being read as such in the churches, a move that helped to curb false teachings and clarify the New Testament canon of scripture for future generations. Augustine’s theological insights have had immeasurable impact throughout the centuries, but especially during the Reformation, and his works are still widely read today.

The life of Augustine began as the story of a prodigal, who threw off the faith he’d been taught in pursuit of pleasure and egotism. But this prodigal who came to the Father in humble repentance, was then transformed into a saint, and was used powerfully for the building up of the Church.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: SAINT AUGUSTINE, BISHOP OF HIPPO, “CONFESSIONS”, TRANS. E.B. PUSEY | DAVID FARMER, “OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS” | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, “THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 1” | GERARD SAMPSON, “LAYMAN’S BOOK OF SAINTS”).

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AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE "FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES", WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of Augustine that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen. Close your time of reflection with a prayer of gratitude for the witness of Augustine.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following collect.

O God, our heavenly Father, who didst raise up thy faithful servant Augustine to be a Bishop in thy Church and to feed thy flock: We beseech thee to send down upon all thy Bishops, the Pastors of thy Church, the abundant gift of thy Holy Spirit, that they, being endued with power from on high, and ever walking in the footsteps of thy holy Apostles, may minister before thee in thy household as true servants of Christ and stewards of thy divine mysteries; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen. (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A BISHOP, P. 312)