

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Aug 28th 2018

Memorial of Saint Augustine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church - Lectionary: 426

Therefore, brothers and sisters, stand firm

and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught,

either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours. 2 Thessalonians 2

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites.

You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin,

and have neglected the weightier things of the law:

judgment and mercy and fidelity. ...

You cleanse the outside of cup and dish,

but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Matthew 23

Jesus and Paul could be writing to us today, pleading with us to be free from so much that is incompatible with our faith in Jesus.

It's so tempting to pick and choose what we prefer to believe or follow. It is easy to be "religious" like the scribes and Pharisees, focusing on the external things of practice, without growing in the interior transformation that comes from a personal relationship with Jesus.

Interior freedom, which leads to greater sensitivity to the needs of others, ultimately to mercy and self-sacrificing love, is a gift. We can't earn it or "do" things to get there. We can, however, ask for it. We can ask our Lord to open our hearts to receive the gift of his love so that we might fall in love with him in return. The more we experience his love for us - messy as we are - the more attracted we are to him. And, the more attracted we are to him the more we will hear his word in ways that draw us closer to him, in affection. Affection for our Lord alone frees our hearts from the patterns, habits, addictions which hold us enslaved and keep us from being free.

Today we remember St. Augustine. I find him a hopeful saint for me. It took him a while to get it. But, when he did, he was "all in." Of course, he had the benefit of his dear and faithful mother, Monica, praying for him. I love the song Roc O'Connor, S.J. wrote, which takes Augustine's prayer and brings it home for each of us: O Beauty Ever Ancient. I love that Augustine can confess, "Late have I loved you." "O late have I turned from seeking you in creatures." "Fleeing grief and pain within." "(I) turned

to seek you in all things, things that you fashioned as a pathway; yet I lost myself in them." "Yet, you called, you shone, you summoned, and you drew my spirit home." And, he can pray, "By your grace you have renewed me; let me live my life in you." "Let me find my life in you."

After listening to this beautiful hymn, each of us could compose our own prayer confessing our unfreedoms and asking for the grace to be renewed and to find our life in Jesus. Late or not, what a great grace.

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