

## St. Augustine

Today, the Church celebrates one of the giants in our faith, the beloved St. Augustine. Over the years, millions have loved St. Augustine because we see ourselves in him – rebellion as a youth, wrestling with our fallen human nature, surrender to Jesus Christ, and a life of adventure in Him.

Our Catholic Tradition refers to St. Augustine as the *Doctor of Grace*. There are few saints who better articulated our need, as God's fallen children, the need for God's grace for forgiveness, healing, and redemption. For Augustine, we cannot merit anything of eternal value without God's grace. He once famously said, "If then your merits are God's gifts, God does not crown your merits as your merits, but as His gifts."

Almost 1,500 years later, a little French nun with a charming little personality and a *deep* love for Jesus (her Fiancée), articulated Augustine's majestic theology of grace with her "little way." For St. Thérèse, *everything* was about Jesus. She once said:

After earth's exile, I hope to go and enjoy you in the fatherland, but I do not want to lay up merits for heaven. I want to work for your *love alone*.... In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you with empty hands, for I do not ask you, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is blemished in your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in your own *justice* and to receive from your *love* the eternal possession of *yourself* (Story of a Soul, 277).

In other words, everything begins with Jesus, is carried out by Jesus' grace, and for Jesus. For Augustine and St. Thérèse, our resumes of good deeds are, in reality, Jesus' good deeds (his love) carried out *in us*. Jesus says it this way, "*Without me you can do nothing*" (Jn 15:5).

Naturally, in our local church, we are experiencing the pains of evil that happened a year ago at Annunciation in Minneapolis. Such dark shadows try to block the Son, the Light of the world. Such evil causes great pain, suffering, and deep sorrow.

Following St. Augustine's doctrine of grace and St. Thérèse's "little way," as disciples of Christ we fall to our knees and implore God's grace. "Lord, *you* are our consolation. *You* are our strength. *You* are our hope. *You* are our first, deepest, and greatest love.

We implore you to comfort, bless, and help all families at Annunciation deeply impacted by this great evil. Comfort those parents who lost their children. Strengthen those parents whose children have been injured. Care of those families who lost parents and grandparents in their hour of pain. Send the Holy Spirit upon their pastor, Fr. Zehren, their principal, teachers, and staff to guide them and fill them with hope and light. And, dear Jesus, comfort your little ones, those students so dear to your Heart who have been traumatized from this horrific event. We love you and trust you!"

St. Augustine's doctrine of grace and St. Thérèse's "little way" give disciples what I called a "Catholic instinct" during times of crisis. During times of great tragedy, we immediately turn to God, recognize our dependency upon him, and ask for a great outpouring of grace and love from his Heart to help us. Christ's love is ancient, yet ever new. For those open and willing to drink, He provides comfort, peace, and strength in such a great hour of need.

The Catholic instinct also immediately turns to God during times of great joy. We express our gratitude to God for the gifts and blessings received from Him. God's gifts are meant for growth in gratitude to God, the building up of the Church, the good of society, and the glory of God.

My brothers and sisters, St. Augustine reminds us that *everything is grace*. During this great hour of need, be *generous*! Be generous with your time with God in prayer, asking him to comfort, bless, and strengthen those dear families at Annunciation suffering so terribly. Be generous with your love and time in reaching to those around you who need a listening ear, a word or encouragement, or simply a warm smile. And finally, be generous with God's grace given to you! The more you share God's grace and love, the more it will flow back to you and *"be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you"* (Lk 6:38).

Mother Teresa once famously said, "Don't curse the darkness. Light a candle." May the light of God's grace flicker brightly in and from you to cast away the shadows of darkness. In this great hour of need, our Lord's words are most apropos: *Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father* (Mt. 5:16).

~St. Augustine, pray for us!