

RESTORE
AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Saturday, May 16

Reading: Romans 13:11-14

Aurelius Augustinus (Augustine)¹ lived during the closing days of the Roman Empire (354-430). He was born to a minor Roman official and a devout Christian mother. In his youth, he was far more interested in seeking thrills and pleasure than in study. He got into all sorts of mischief and trouble. At the age of 17, he had the opportunity to study in Carthage. He was ready to leave his small town for the big city. Away from the influence of his mother, Augustine dove into the “party lifestyle.” He did whatever gave him pleasure and associated with other young men who boasted about the sexual exploits. Augustine took a mistress and soon had a son. He would continue this extra-marital relationship for the next 15 years.

It was while at school in Carthage that young Augustine also fell in love with philosophy and rhetoric. He became an exceptional student and upon graduation would teach rhetoric in Carthage and Rome. At age 30 (384), Augustine moved to Milan and took the prestigious position of professor of rhetoric at this important school. But he wanted nothing to do with his mother’s faith. He believed Christianity was for uneducated naïve people. He studied many of the pagan cults of his day as well as the religions that blended pagan philosophy with twisted Christian doctrine. But despite all his learning, his growing success as a teacher, and the pleasure he got from his relationship with his mistress, Augustine felt empty. He felt he was “a captive...to his own lusts and passions. He was a man at war with himself.”²

In Milan, Augustine met Ambrose, the Christian bishop of the city. In Ambrose, Augustine found a man who was both an educated scholar and a devout Christian. He was impressed by Ambrose’s character and love for people as well as by his knowledge and eloquent sermons. Slowly, Augustine began his long journey to faith in Christ.

One day as he paced in his garden struggling with the Christian faith he saw in Ambrose and his own hedonistic lifestyle, Augustine seemed to hear the voice of a child say to him, “Take up and read!” Nearby he found a copy of Paul’s letter to the Romans. He opened it and his eyes fell on this passage:

“Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts”
(Romans 13:13-14)

Augustine would later write, “The instant I reached the end of the sentence, it seemed the light of peace was poured into my heart, and all shades of doubt faded away.”² On Easter Sunday AD 387, Ambrose baptized Augustine. Four years later, Augustine was ordained as a priest in Hippo, North Africa (modern Algeria) and later became the bishop.

Augustine is recognized as one of the great shapers of the church through his preaching and many writings. His ‘*City of God*’ is still a classic work read today. He focused on defending the Christian faith and emphasized the grace of God. In his ‘*Confessions*’, he tells the story of his sinful youth and his struggle to find the truth. “He was a fractured man made whole by Christ.”³

¹ Alton Gansky. “Augustine of Hippo” 60 People Who Shaped the Church., p. 90-98
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo

² Gansky, p. 92-93 ³ Gansky, p. 98