

AUGUSTINE ON PRAYER

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PRAYER IN MAN'S QUEST FOR HAPPINESS

Desire for a Happy Life

“**E**VERY MAN, whatsoever his condition, desires to be happy,” declares Augustine. “There is no man who does not desire this, and each one desires it with such earnestness that he prefers it to all other things; whoever, in fact, desires other things, desires them for this end alone.”¹ There are various ways of living adopted by men, “yet, in whatever kind of life he chooses, there is no man who does not wish to be happy.”² “To aim at the happy life, to wish for the happy life, to covet the happy life, to seek it and follow after it, is, I think, the business of all men.”³ This desire, then, is common to all men; to all men, absolutely — be they good or evil. “He who is good is therefore good that he may be happy; and he who is evil would not be so, if he despaired of the possibility of being happy by that means.”⁴ But, while no one escapes this universal thirst for happiness, or disputes its existence, nevertheless a good deal of controversy appears to revolve around its object. All men seek happiness: “But to know where to find this thing desired of all; that is disputed among them, that divides them.”⁵

Some people seek happiness in wealth;⁶ others seek it in honors;⁷ others again in the pleasures of the body.⁸ More prudent people seek their happiness in knowledge,⁹ or in virtue,¹⁰ or, like the philosophers, in wisdom.¹¹ All of them tend toward the same goal by a multiplicity of ways, and the goal they seek is the delight they hope to enjoy in being happy. And though the ways they follow in search of this enjoyment may differ, still they come to the experience of it by a rhythmic movement of the soul, simple in character and common to all. The first movement is of the intellectual order: they must know the object that offers them happiness. “For who can love what he does not know?”¹² This knowledge, manifestly, must concern the beauty, charm, and

WHY WE SHOULD PRAY

That We May Keep God's Commandments

OUR LOVE FOR GOD is measured, not by how we feel, but by how we live; not by sentimentality and emotion, but by our conduct and behavior. *He who obeys the commandments he has from me is the man who loves me*, declared our divine Lord (John 14:21). And again, *Anyone who loves me will be true to my word* (John 14:23). Our union of love with God, therefore, consists in the fulfilling of his will as expressed in the commandments. "I would that you conform your life and behavior to God's commandments, which we have received as the rule of right living,"¹ wrote Augustine. He tells us, furthermore, that to so conform our lives we must pray for divine assistance. "Let us live well; and that we may live well let us invoke the aid of him who has commanded us to live well."² But if we would live well and grow in this union of love with God we must avoid evil and do good. And the good we must do and the evil we must avoid are made clear to us in the commandments of God.

"Now, the Lord himself not only shows us what evil we should avoid and what good we should do — which is all the letter of the law can do — he helps us also *turn from evil and do good* (Psalm 37:27), which is something no one can do without the spirit of grace. If this is wanting, the law comes in only to make us guilty and to destroy us. It is for this reason that the Apostle says: *The written law kills, but the Spirit gives life* (2 Corinthians 3:6). He, therefore, who uses the law lawfully learns good and evil in it if he does not confide in his own strength, but flies rather to grace by the help of which he may avoid evil and do good."³

"It is quite obvious that to know the commandments of God is one thing, to keep them is another. The knowledge of them does not of itself impart the power to keep them. Consequently, God's help does not consist in this only, that we have learned by our

HOW WE SHOULD PRAY

Prayer Should Come From the Heart

P RAYER IS THE AFFECTIONATE reaching out of the mind for God. It is the articulation of the pilgrim's desire for God and for the eternal happiness which God has promised to those who love him. "For something is promised which we do not yet possess, but because he who has promised is true, we rejoice in hope, and because we have not received what he has promised, we sigh with yearning."¹ This yearning of the heart is our prayer, so prayer must come from the heart. And since our prayer is the expression of our heart's desire, it follows that prayer is an internal rather than an external operation. "Prayer is a spiritual thing," says Augustine, "and the truer it is to its nature the more pleasing it is to God."² It can never be just a matter of words. Prayer is the language of love. "Let there be earnest affection in prayer and the effectual answer of him who hears it will be realized."³ "If you knock with pious affection and with sincere heartfelt love, he who sees from what motive you knock will open unto you."⁴

As we have seen, prayer has a voice of its own, quite apart from the voice of the one who prays. "Crying to God is not done with the physical voice, but with the heart. Many whose lips are silent cry out with the heart; many are noisy with their mouths but with their hearts averted are able to obtain nothing. If, then, you cry to God, cry out inwardly where he hears you."⁵ The voice of prayer is the voice of the heart's desire. Let us recall, however, that Augustine uses the term "heart" in a scriptural sense. For him it signifies — as it does in many passages of Scripture — our whole interior and spiritual life, and it includes mind and will, knowledge and love. Knowledge founded on faith, whereby we believe that God hears and answers us; love, which grows and expands through hope in the benefactor from whom we await a favorable

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Unity in Multiplicity

INSOFAR AS CHRIST is the source from which we receive the life of grace, he is, from that point of view, the “Father” of our supernatural life. But if he be the “Father” of a supernatural family, he must have a bride; and it is the Church that is chosen as the spouse of Christ. Through her he brings us forth to the life of grace, builds himself a family that shall grow into a great people — the city of God. “We had a father and mother on earth that we might be born to labor and death; but we have found other parents: God our Father and the Church our Mother, by whom we are born unto life everlasting.”¹ There were two things, according to Augustine, that our Divine Lord loved above all others on this earth: his mother and his Church. “Mary mothered your leader,” preached Augustine; “the Church mothered you; for she also is mother and virgin. Mother through the womb of her charity; virgin in the integrity of her faith and of her piety. She issues to the world entire peoples, but they are all members of a single Christ, of which she is the body and the spouse. One can say of her as of Mary: She is the mother of unity in multiplicity.”²

The comparison according to which the Church appears as an interior and spiritual society of souls, linked directly to the Incarnate Word as to its chief, is inspired by the Gospel, in which Christ said to his apostles: *Live on in me, as I do in you. No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me* (John 15:4). This organic unity is again explicitly affirmed by Saint Paul. *The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one body; and so it is with Christ. It was in one Spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into one body. All of us have been given to drink of one Spirit* (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). This unity in multiplicity, this oneness of his members